CAPTAIN
ZILLNER

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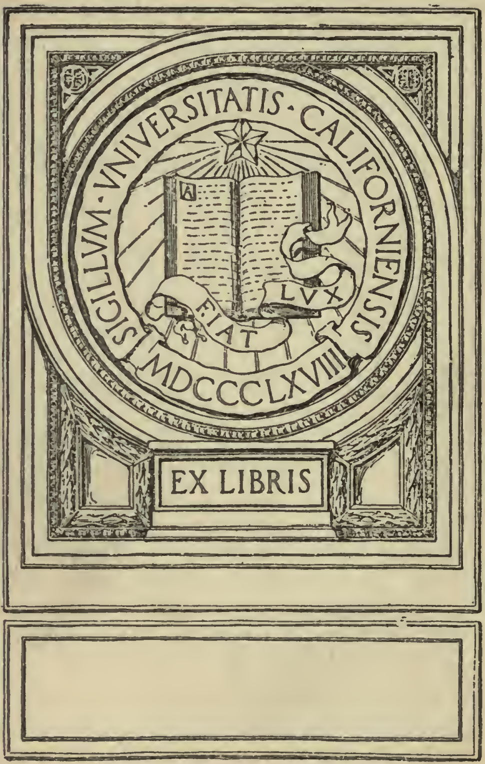

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CAPTAIN ZILLNER

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A HUMAN DOCUMENT

BY

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CHAPTER I

THROUGH the streets of Vienna rode the shade of the hero, Prince Eugene. '*Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter* . . . '—youth and age were humming the same old song. Youth and age thronged in the highways of the city, ardent, enthusiastic, with clenched fists threatening Belgrade.

Lieutenant Hans Zillner stood watching the crowd, noting the chaotic beauty in its unity of purpose: the common eagerness for war. Soberly critical as was his nature, he could not help feeling a thrill at the subjective power of these masses that swirled like a flood over the streets and squares. Everywhere, at any time, the crowd was always ready for a patriotic demonstration, with hoarse-throated shoutings of excited zeal. But to-day the street scene had a tinge of something more than this—something almost awe-inspiring. Streets and byeways, and the broader thoroughfares, were filled with this new spirit, that surged abroad, sweeping all before it, in that fifth hour of the afternoon on the 1st of August 1914. There was but little sign of haste; each man was taking time, as it were, to fall into the new order of things. At every corner, heavy-lettered placards flung out the command: General Mobilisation.

The young officer strolled down the Ring. Many women passed him, and as he looked into their faces he seemed to read there earnestness, and something of fear, but fear under restraint. The men's faces, too, he studied curiously. Most of them, he fancied, wore an absent look, as if the mind were occupied within, uncertain of its attitude as yet. Only a few walked boldly and jauntily, with heads in air—young officers these, for the most part. He stopped on a sudden impulse,

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and looked at himself in the glass of a shop window. Strange, he too looked just a little nervous.

He reached the imposing, over-decorated offices of the War Ministry, and was rather surprised to find no concentration of the crowd outside. There were about a hundred people gathered round the Radetzky Monument, mostly young men of the student class. '*Gott erhalte,*' they sang, with faces upraised towards the kindly smiling countenance of the warrior's statue; they bared their heads, and gave the full force of their lungs to the song. When the last note of '*Oesterreich wird ewig stehn*' had died away, a man climbed the steps of the pedestal, and made a speech, full of great words and phrases; the soul of empire, and its awakening, eternal ignominy, final expiation, and the like. He was just at the end of his peroration, exalting 'the unalterable will to do the deed' when another crowd came pouring out from the direction of the Custom House, with black-and-white and black-red-and-yellow flags at the head. And suddenly they broke into a new song, the '*Wacht am Rhein.*'

'*Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein* . . .' a storm of strong and confident assurance.

Zillner had remained standing at the edge of the pavement; the crowd was growing denser now on every side. It was a heterogeneous, casual gathering, brought together by the moment. And all looked up with eager eyes at the windows of the great War Office building, lit now from without by the setting sun.

'*Wir alle wollen Hüter sein!*' The young singers poured out their vows in a chorus of unshaken faith that filled the square, and hovered above the living wall now growing thicker every moment, until at last the wall itself moved, surged forward over the street, and broke.

The singers were swallowed up in a moment, engulfed in the dark swarm of the crowd. The smiling warrior held out one bronze hand as if in benediction over a sea of heads, all bared. The square was filled with a heaving, swirling mass, growing greater and denser as new streams poured in from side streets and corners. The tram service was suspended altogether, the police were helpless as buoys in the flow of the tide.

Zillner had been carried away by the rush of the crowd, and stood now facing one corner of the monument.

'Lieb Vaterland, magst ruhig sein,
Fest steht und treu die Wacht, die Wacht am Rhein.'

Thousands were singing now, and ever again rose a thunder of ' Hoch ' and ' Hurrah ' until the very ground seemed to tremble.

A little man, with a gold watch-chain stretched across a prominent waistcoat, and beads of perspiration on his nose, lifted up his voice, and cried, ' Forward, Austria ! ' Two ladies waved their parasols enthusiastically, and a young man shouted '*Nazdar*,' the Czech hurrah, a Slav note in the German chorus, bearing witness to the concord of nations.

A man close by turned on the Czech excitedly. ' We don't want any of your "*Nazdar*" here. This is a German affair, and no business of yours.'

The young Slav shrank back, but a burly citizen came to the rescue. ' Leave the boy alone. He 's the right sort, anyway ; let him say it how he likes.'

' So he is,' joined in the gentleman with the prominent watch-chain. ' Let there be no discord at this solemn hour.' And he raised one hand on high, pointing towards the evening sky, all blue and green and gold.

' Ahem ! This manifestation of the common purpose, the unity of the nation thus spontaneously expressed, is proof that Austria is prepared for action; ready to show its will in the actual deed. Yes, "*Wir alle wollen Hüter sein!*"—we are all prepared to guard—to guard——'

' Guard what ? ' grumbled out a deep bass redolent of beer. ' There 's no Rhine here that I know of.'

But the eloquent speech was not continued. A burst of wild cheering suddenly broke out, and was repeated again and again. At one of the windows in the War

Office building a figure had appeared, a vague silhouette against the dazzling gleam of the flashing panes. It was impossible even to see whether it was an officer or a civilian. But some one in the crowd had shouted, 'There he is. The War Minister.' And immediately the whole sea of people answered to the cry, sending a crashing cheer up to the anonymous shadow before them.

'Just like a crowd,' thought Zillner, with a scornful smile. 'What a senseless beast it is. Cheering now—and if things go wrong, they 'll be just as ready to shout the other way to-morrow, and demand the heads of the innocent criminals they cheer to-day.' The vein of scepticism in his nature, which led him constantly to look for the reverse of things seemingly grand, called up now in his mind the picture of a mining district in Mähren, where three years before he had fired on a howling mob of infuriated strikers. He thought of Prague, where not so long ago the mob and the cultured element had combined in acts of ravage and destruction such as one might have thought to find only among primitive barbarians.

The crowd: a monster, untamable, altogether unreliable. And yet, in spite of all, he felt a warm thrill at his heart. Those last few verses of the '*Wacht am Rhein*,' ringing out through the air till the song seemed to have drawn the masses up into itself, obliterating all inherent selfishness, and leading even that unreasoning many-headed beast to vows of patriotic devotion—he, too, for a moment had felt the glamour of it all; had seen all things, as it were, through a veil, and felt without shame the hot tears welling up into his eyes. After all, there was something magnificent in it all; in the thing that lay behind this bitterly solemn hour. Mobilisation: no empty word, but a terrible reality. Leave-taking, and a setting out from home, to face hardships and misery, mutilation, death. For many, a captivity from which they would never return. It was the ordered life of a whole people suddenly thrown out of gear.

For an hour or more he stood there among these thousands of his fellow-men, who understood what this thing meant, saw all the horror that lay behind it, and yet cried out full-throated welcome now that it had come.

‘If they mean it—if they can keep it up—we must win,’ said Zillner to himself, his eyes gleaming. But he could not help casting a glance at the portly gentleman with the perspiring nose, who was speechmaking again, turning out whole leading articles with catch-words such as ‘Indo-Germanic brotherhood,’ the ‘heroic ideal,’ the ‘irresistible advance of iron wheels’—a litany of sounding phrases. ‘Pot-bellied braggart. Always these miserable ineligibles that have most to say. Optimistic fools. Yet, if only the country could hold on, in spite of them. . . . But was it possible, after all?’ There was doubt in Zillner's mind as he forced his way through the close-packed throng, and made towards the centre of the town. The square was still full of people, and more came crowding in continually, to stand staring patiently up at the windows, behind which, in nervous haste, the advance of the Austrian forces was being prepared. He walked on, bowed beneath a weight of heavy thought, when suddenly there was the rattle of a sabre at his side, and a voice hailed him cheerily by name.

He turned, and a big hand grasped his, as though intent on crushing it. It was Karl Albert Kraft, the painter, his big frame squeezed into a tight service uniform, and a smile in his fine eyes. ‘Funny to come across you at the very start. Piece of luck, I call it.’

‘But what are you doing here?’ asked Zillner in surprise. ‘I thought you were in Berlin.’

‘I was. And came home like a shot as soon as we got the news. Wouldn't have missed this for anything.’ He linked his arm in Zillner's, and the two friends walked up through the twilight towards the Opera House.

‘It 's wonderful, you know,’ went on Kraft, ‘all this spontaneous feeling. All the grey everyday life transfigured—all one wave of patriotic feeling. Look at the streets here—all these thousands—and then, “*Die*

Wacht am Rhein . . . " All answering to one call. . . . And on the way in—every station crowded with people, shouting and singing. . . .'

'And at home? In Bohemia, what do they think of it there?'

'There too. The same everywhere. It's grand. The old dream has come true at last. Austria the Great. All the wild forces of war let loose; no more thinking about petty little local politics, no more question of Czech or Slav; all are united now. War. That's the magic word that grips their hearts. It's all one fatherland now, Austria.'

'Do you really believe that the Czechs and Ruthenians, the Poles and Italians and the Magyars have turned Austrians in a moment just because the same thing threatens us all? Austria has always been our country —but will this make it theirs? I doubt it.'

'Oh, you eternal unbeliever,' laughed the other. 'Look about you and see.'

The electric lamps were lighting up all down the Ringstrasse. Bodies of troops, in varying numbers, came marching up, with flags and cheering. There was a good deal of noisy enthusiasm, boys shouting and laughing, and plainly over-excited. The people on the pavements looked on somewhat coolly at the maudlin demonstration, a caricature of the true feeling, and due chiefly to a natural reaction against the hard necessity that forced them to go with the rest, whether they would or no.

'I don't care much for patriotism that smells of beer,' said Zillner.

His companion looked out thoughtfully toward the restlessly flickering lights. 'One or two of them here and there may be drunk,' he admitted. 'But what does it matter—a tiny speck of base metal here and there, when all the gold is aglow. Think of the wonder of it all—from Trieste to Prague. This Austria of ours, always hesitating, doubting up to now, has pulled itself together at last. The world used to shrug its shoulders at us in scorn—Austria would never do anything. But now—they are beginning to look up in surprise. And they will end in admiration.'

'If we win, you mean?'

'If! We must win. There is no question of that. When nations unite as we have done now, under one empire, they are invincible.'

They turned off into the Karlsplatz, where the mighty dome of the church stood out vaguely against the starlit sky. From the gardens of the Konzert Haus came the sound of music.

'I'm going out to supper,' said Zillner. 'Sort of farewell party, you know. It's a pity, though; we might have spent the evening together.'

'But—does that mean—surely you're not giving up your berth in the War Office?'

'My dear fellow, you don't think I could stay on here doing office work now? You'll be with your old regiment—so we shall be in the same brigade.'

'Well, that's good news.' The painter grasped his friend's hand warmly. 'I'm awfully glad you're coming. It'll be a grand time, you'll see.'

'Until the dying begins,' said Zillner, with a laugh.

'Puh! As long as the business itself goes off all right, that's all that really matters. Oh, it's a wonderful thing to think it's come at last.'

The two friends parted at the entrance to the gardens, and went their separate ways.

The fashionable restaurant was filled to overflowing. Tables were set under the scanty foliage of the city-bred trees, that seemed gasping for air. An atmosphere of leave-taking was everywhere apparent; a carelessly sentimental farewell to the easy life of everyday, the clinking of glasses, wishes for success and a happy return, and a fine confidence, which, as the wine passed round, grew to unshakable assurance of victory. The band played German potpourris, waltzes, and popular tunes from the Vienna music-halls, with every now and again a more serious note, in keeping with the occasion. Prince Eugene's song, '*O du mein Oesterreich*' and the Radetzky March broke in continually upon the lighter music of the customary programme, like a ribbon of steel about a bouquet of delicate roses. And each time a storm of clapping and cheering rang through the place, to be heard far out across the street, and echoed by the excited crowds outside. The military element predominated; uniforms were everywhere. The only men in civilian dress were a few in the covered verandah, elegantly got-up elderly gentlemen of the Hofrath type, as a kind of soberly distinguished binding to the richly decorated *édition de luxe* of this new national work. Many of the men in uniform, however, had evidently only recently put off their everyday clothes. They were spectacled and bearded gentlemen, proud but a little embarrassed in their tight tunics, and with yellow leggings on their peaceable calves—officers of the Landsturm, conscious of their dignity. Here were a couple of grey-haired cavalry officers, who had never advanced beyond the rank of lieutenant; old warriors of the feudal type, anxious to take part in the campaign, and ready to shed their last drop of blood in their country's service, with a preference for the higher staff appointments if obtainable. In a word, a splendid and varied picture of patriotic manhood, framed in the bravely simulated gaiety of their womenfolk, while above, the stars in their thousands twinkled indifferently down upon the throng.

Zillner soon discovered the party he was seeking. Lieutenant Baron Krottenburg, with his wife, and some brother officers, sat at a table not far from the entrance. Zillner knew them all, but there was one of the men whom he was not altogether pleased to meet again. Captain Zapperer, of the General Staff, was one of those men who make successful careers. And Zillner did not care to be reminded of the old days at the Cadet School, where his own progress had been checked by an inherent lack of diplomatic adaptability, while others, like

Zapperer, better able to ingratiate themselves in the proper quarters, had wormed their way into the bottle-green of the General Staff. And to-day of all days, when the dream of every soldier was about to be fulfilled, he could well have dispensed with Captain Zapperer.

The party greeted him heartily as he came up.

'You 're ever so late, you know,' said Baroness Lisl in her idly graceful way. 'And it 's really a pity, for the war 's almost over, isn't it, Moritz ?'

Krottenburg, a strikingly handsome man of imperturbable self-possession, looked up with a serious air. 'Well, we were just trying to work it out, you know—see how long it ought to take us. Opinions are divided. I say, by about the end of October. By that time, we shall have made a few decent charges, the autumn rains will be coming on, and messing up all the ground, the horses will be about done up, and then it 'll be time to stop. Can't go on without the horses, you know.'

'By Christmas Eve, not a day longer,' put in von Pelzl, a man of spherical build. 'The Russians will be done for by then. But here, the General Staff ought to know all about it. Zapperer, you 're the high Court of Appeal. What do *you* say ? Now listen.'

Zapperer, General *in spe*, had been sitting with his features composed in an expression of gallant condescension which he was wont to assume at the toast of 'The Ladies' ; he changed it in a moment, however, and put on another mask, according to the formula : 'Prepare to attack' (stern tension of the facial muscles, deep vertical wrinkles down the brow, *à la Napoléon*) ; and in a voice of unchallenged authority, he delivered his opinion. 'There can be no question. We must take the offensive, and maintain it, regardless of cost. That, gentlemen, is the only way to victory. Forward unceasingly, march them down without mercy—and that simultaneously on both fronts. The Chief holds the same view.'

'H'm,' put in Zillner. 'A bold plan, a very bold plan. Not even Napoleon ventured to work on those lines. He took the offensive against what he considered to be the most dangerous enemy position. That he dealt with himself, leaving his marshals to keep the rest in check.'

The representative of the General Staff laughed in superior scorn, as one accustomed to refute with perfect ease whatever ridiculous objections might be put forward by ordinary mortals of lower intelligence. ' Napoleon's methods are a thing of the past. Modern war is too expensive for that sort of thing. We must use the start we have got to the best advantage. Serbia, of course, will go to pieces by itself—an impoverished country, rotten with corruption in all departments, and seriously weakened by the late war. The whole thing is perfectly simple. A concentric invasion in three columns, and then on, like a steam roller, to Kragujevacs, to the heart of Serbia itself. Belgrade will collapse automatically. By the 18th of August, or say the end of the month at latest, the country will be at His Majesty's feet. The Chief, I may say, holds the same view. Then as to Russia '—this with a deepening of the wrinkles in his brow—' there, I admit, we have more serious difficulties to face. And for that very reason, we must tackle the Russians at once, before they are able to operate in full force. It will take them a month to mobilise ; for the present, ten army corps is the utmost they can put into the field. We have fourteen, counting the reserve formations, and within seven days of mobilisation they can be in position in Galicia. Then, on to Kiev, without delay, occupying the place before the enemy has had time to concentrate his main force. The Polish insurgents, of course, and the Independents' party in Ukraine, will come over to us as we go on. There are sixty millions of non-Russians longing to throw off the Muscovite yoke. As regards the question of time, then, the whole campaign, down to the last decisive battle, should be practically over by the 15th of October. Our armies will then '—the speaker raised his eyebrows, and spoke in an easier tone—' will then, making allowance for possible delays, by the end of November, or at latest the beginning of December, have occupied South Russia, and be able to dictate the terms of peace from there.'

Baroness Lisl leaned over to Zillner, and whispered in his ear. 'Really, I can't stand much more of this,' she said. 'Conceited nonsense—it makes one simply ill to hear it. And to think that thousands must give their lives to let these windbags put their theories to the test. It 's too horrible.'

But the rest of the company seemed in the main to agree with the principles laid down by Zapperer in his instructive lecture. The rate of progress, as there indicated, was very satisfactory indeed. They would be back in Vienna for Christmas after all—the very thing. Lieutenant Graf Selztal, a little man who had said nothing up to then, but sat silently putting away glass after glass of Gumpoldskirchner, suddenly woke up and croaked out fiercely: 'That 's it—go in and rush them down—the dogs. Rush them down. Hurrah!'

Captain Pelzl glanced across at Baroness Lisl, who was staring before her, slightly pale, and deep in thought. 'And you, Baroness, what do you say to the war?'

'If you care to know,' she began, turning her eyes upon him with a sudden flash, 'I think . . .' Suddenly she gave way, and burst out passionately, her voice choking with tears. 'Oh, it is madness, a wicked, wicked madness. The thousands that must die, the thousands that must be crippled for life—and why, why? To move some frontier this way or that? Will that make any one happier? What do I care for their frontiers? I want my husband. If I lose him, what is there left? What—is—there—left—to—me?' She broke down, and sobbed aloud.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Captain Zapperer of the General Staff laughed scornfully. Krottenburg was helpless and embarrassed. 'Lisl, my dear,' he said kindly, in his easy drawling voice, 'how can you talk such—such nasty socialistic stuff? And just when we 're going to begin, and all—you unsoldierly little beggar.'

Pelzl, the heavyweight, gave a little laugh. '*Mulier taceat in bello.* Pardon, Baroness, but you know . . . '

'Not at all. You 're quite right. It was very stupid of me.' Baroness Lisl looked over at her husband with earnest eyes; her lips still trembled.

'She 's wildly in love with him, poor thing,' thought Zillner to himself.

Pelzl rang his glass to call for silence. 'Here 's to our next merry meeting. All of us here, this day next year. All of us. Beat the lot of them, and a safe return to us all.'

The whole party drank, clinking their glasses. But Lisl whispered to her husband, 'Moritz, I can't. I don't care if we win, if only you come back—you must come back to me. . . .'

'Little stupid . . . of course I shall.'

Some one suggested champagne as a pick-me-up, though the party had drunk a good deal of wine already. Krottenburg was for going round to somewhere else—'Grabencafe, for instance—it 's more fun there.' The motion was carried, and the bill was called for.

They were preparing to leave, when, for about the tenth time that evening, the band struck up '*Gott erhalte.*' All rose to their feet, the officers at the salute. '*Heil dem Kaiser, Heil dem Lande, Oesterreich wird ewig stehn.*' A tumult of 'Hochs' and 'Hurrahs' crashed out from all sides, with a ringing of glasses at the tables.

'Infernally powerful thing, that hymn,' said Zillner to Baroness Lisl. 'Say what you will about the words—the music is wonderful. I can't help feeling a little cold shiver every time I hear it.'

'Yes,' agreed the Baroness, still pale, and speaking half to herself. 'Infernally. . . . Yes . . . '

As they neared the entrance, a tall, thin man in general's uniform passed in, walking with rapid steps. The officers stood aside and saluted, Zapperer with a rigidity indicative of the profoundest respect. For it was none other than the Chief himself, Conrad v. Hotzendoff, the Minister of War, the hope and mainstay of all Austria. He was looking much as usual, with the characteristic nervous twitchings of the muscles on the left side of his face, and in the shoulders.

'He 's aged a good deal lately,' observed Captain Pelzl thoughtfully. 'Looks nervous, too.'

'No wonder,' said Zillner. 'A man of that forceful type waiting for years to strike the one decisive blow, and then, by some inscrutable providence, compelled to let one chance after another go by—until it 's almost too late . . . '

'Glad you take such a hopeful view of things,' said Zapperer, with a sarcastic grin to Zillner.

'I said "almost,"' answered the other coldly. 'No doubt the exertions of our infallible General Staff will pull the thing through.'

The others laughed, Baroness Lisl, clinging affectionately to her husband's arm, nudged him with a bright little smile.

But the ornament of the bottle-green corps was not pleased. 'Very funny, no doubt,' he muttered, with an unfriendly glance at Zillner, and, without any definite excuse, he walked away.

The rest of the party, now in the best of spirits, took their way to the Grabencafe.

. . . .

Late next morning, Zillner awoke with a bad head, and an uneasy feeling that the great day had somehow ended awkwardly. His party had stayed some hours at the Grabencafe, drinking a good deal of champagne, with the usual result. The solemnity of the occasion, which all had felt at first, had gradually given place to a careless gaiety. The catchy melodies from the Vienna music-halls had whirled them out of all consciousness beyond the moment. Serious matters were forgotten, ceremony was laid aside, all talked at once and without restraint, and the vein of sentimentality latent in the

Viennese temperament asserted itself. At such times men will be moved to confide their most intimate secrets to a perfect stranger, and with tears in their eyes, and much emotion, embrace and console each other.

There had been several cases of the sort that evening. And Zillner, calling to mind one episode after another, as he dressed, felt something like disgust at it all. One fellow with a foolish sickly face, who might have been a shop assistant, had clambered on a table, and made a speech about the 'Path of Heroes,' quoting apparently from something he had read, in phrases of intolerable banality and the cheapest sentiment. And that miserable little caricature of humanity had been lifted on men's shoulders and chaired round the room with shouts of applause. Ugh! Then an old retired captain, a withered relic with the meek resignation of a long-forgotten pensioner, had pulled out a copy of the Emperor's manifesto, and read it aloud: a piping little voice, wheezing in senile emotion, a figure swaying this way and that as he read. And then at the words, 'I have given all these things my deepest consideration,' he had fallen forward, unable to proceed, into the arms of a stout lady, whom he had never seen before, and hung weeping on her neck, sobbing out again and again, 'Our Emperor—our noble Emperor, our noble Emperor'—until at last, the lady, who had borne her burden at first with patriotic self-sacrifice, at last became impatient, and looked round for help, and a rescue party carried off the captain to the fountain, leaving him there to cool. Then towards the end, there had been a disturbance of a different sort—a youth, with flashing eyes and very dirty cuffs, had broken in upon the general outburst of martial enthusiasm and wine-heated acclamation, by shouting out suddenly, 'What are you cheering for?' And in the pause of astonishment that followed, he went on: 'Patriotic fools! What is there to cheer about? Permission to go out and murder your fellow-men? A game licence, valid for human souls. I say this war is a disgrace to civilisation—a disgrace . . .' At this point he had been seized and thrown out of the place amid a chorus of angry cries: ‘A Serbian—out with him, a Serbian.’ Zillner remembered the man distinctly; a face with the passionate pallor of the fanatic, that he would know among a thousand.

Baroness Lisl was the only one who had shown any sign of pity for the boy—evidently an anarchist. It was like her. Zillner smiled as he buckled on his sword: yes, that was the one bright spot in the murky nastiness of that early morning riot. One woman with her splendid love for a man, her charming scorn of mere logic and sense. And then Krottenburg, languid as ever, impeccably correct in all things, taking it calmly as a pasha. What a pair they made. He remembered how she had implored the somewhat fuddled Pelzl again and again not to send her Moritz out on any nasty dangerous patrol work—‘dear Captain Pelzl, you ’ll keep him somewhere at the back, won’t you—for my sake.’ Pelzl, of course, had promised everything. ‘For your sake, my dear Baroness—why, we ’d keep him at home if you asked it.’ And that false, fat man had been paid on the spot with a kiss from his subaltern’s wife, to the uproarious delight of the rest. Poor Baroness Lisl. By now she would be sitting in a corner crying. And how many others in the same plight as she, torn by consuming fear, tortured and broken by this thing—War. Thank Heaven, there was no one to be miserable for his sake. That, at any rate, he was spared. No one . . .

Suddenly he remembered Clarisse. But that was over now. When was it he had seen her last? Yes, at the races, surrounded by a swarm of infatuated Hussars. And he had not cared. Clarisse was a physical attraction only—he would not take *that* with him to the war. It was over.

He stepped across to the open window; the sun was blazing down on the street below. He drew in his breath deeply. That Whit Monday had been just such a bright sunny day. He had been with her then for the last time—had felt the ripe beauty of her thirty years, and succumbed to its charm—for the last time. And after, he had steeled himself to tell her that he would come no more; that he felt himself degraded by an intimacy which held nothing more than that, *that*.

He stared absently at the bare walls of the tall building opposite, and the close of that scene rose once more in his mind—her wide eyes, framed in a bluish shadow, and the terror in them. 'Hans, how could you dare, oh, how could you. . . .' And then she had sprung up and flung her arms about him, stammering and trembling. 'Say you didn't mean it, Hans—let me forget it. Oh, what have I done? Dearest, my dearest, what have I ever done?' But his passion was gone, and he had thrust her from him brutally. And she had screamed that he was killing her, that she could not live and know she was no more than that for him, and then suddenly a change. Quietly she had risen, and left the room, and he stood there alone. He had gained his freedom.

But after some long minutes she had come back, dressed, pale, and proud as a queen. And for a moment he had felt as if he must crave forgiveness of this lady for the words he had said to his mistress. But he could find no words to bridge the gulf between the two. And then—his carriage was ready. He kissed her hand and went. In the doorway he turned—he could see her now as he had seen her then, seated at the little writing-table, with her head buried in her hands. A late sunbeam played in her hair, lighting it with a red-gold flame. And her shoulders moved convulsively. . . . He had gained his freedom—but he fled from the house like a criminal, and flung himself into his carriage. That pitiful movement of the shoulders—it had haunted him for days and weeks. What a victory to have gained! He was not a man of prudish morals, and the part he had played here called up all the irony of his nature against himself.

After a while he had grown calmer. He had resumed his quiet way of life, with exercise and study, and felt the better for it. Clarisse and her beauty had no temptation for him now. He had seen her that day at the races, pale and handsome as ever, with the same queenly mien, but his heart had not beat the faster. It was over —and he was glad to have done with it.

He lit a cigarette. The memories faded, and the blank wall opposite, at which he had been staring, stood there lifeless and dull in the sunlight. It flashed across his mind that men on the point of death see visions of their past; that must be what had brought it all back again. After all, everything about him was dying now. All the easy pleasures of everyday life—the greyness of that life itself—all were crumbling to nothing in the rush of the storm that was sweeping over the earth. He himself felt now, more intensely than ever before, the workings of that instinct which, as long as earth shall last, must be most vital of all in every man worth the name—the instinct of battle. And now that it was sure, was there not something behind the flutter of all these tinsel phrases? For him at least it seemed so. It was a grand thing after all, to merge one's individuality in the flood of one great purpose; a man's own life, and the little matters of his own existence, were ridiculously small beside the whole.

Zillner glanced rapidly through the morning papers over his lunch. All had leading articles rejoicing in glowing words that the hour for action had come. With the firm step of a free man, and inspired by the grandeur of mighty things happening around him, Zillner hurried to the Ministry of War, to arrange for his transfer to the forces on active service.

. . . .

Zillner's brother officer, the poet Hans Heinz Sarapatka, had been waiting for nearly an hour in the lobby to hand in his draft, and there seemed every prospect of his having to wait indefinitely. The place seemed full of generals dropping in on their way to the front. One distinguished personage after another passed through the covered door to the sanctum where Major-General Brenzler held sway as the Minister's right-hand man and all-powerful confidant. The poet had to wait. Sarapatka, whose name unfortunately betrayed his not sufficiently German birth—he wrote as a rule under a German pseudonym—shook his unsoldierlike mane impatiently from time to time, and looking angrily at his pink and carefully polished nails. Still no prospect of admittance. He sat down on a seat in the lobby, and took out his manuscript. This time at least he had been given a task worthy of a poet's mind. It was a Proclamation 'to the People of Russian Poland,' to be delivered that day, the third of August, and, as the Chief had put it, with 'Plenty of go in it, you know—while of course always preserving a certain restraint and dignity of tone, as proper to a document emanating from a *kaiserl. und königl.* department.' The combination presented not a little difficulty to effect with harmony, but Hans Heinz had called forth all the resources of his practised technique, and was properly satisfied with the result.

He invariably found an intoxicating pleasure in reading his own productions; now also, he gave himself up to enthusiastic contemplation of his latest work, finding beauty in isolated details, and something magnificent in the effect of the whole. He tasted the words inwardly as a connoisseur, licking his lips, as it were, in appreciation. A fine piece of work. The proclamation would be flung out in thousands of copies, from the bayonets of a victorious army, to be eagerly grasped by a population longing for deliverance. It was a noble thought, and not unworthy of a poet. Had he not also written it with his heart's blood? After all, none but the poet could thoroughly inflame the hearts of men.

Sarapatka found a certain satisfaction in this last thought. This really was the final blow—his work. The Polish nation would be ultimately conquered by his words; the part accorded to Austria by tradition as a deliverer would be merely relying on brute force; it was the poetic element that counted. If he, Hans Sarapatka, had but been called upon at the proper time to exhort the Serbians, who knows ? Much might then have been different. But it was too late.

He sighed deeply. With this invaluable work of his—and to let him sit there waiting—it was an affront, no less. He looked impatiently at the clock. Twelve. A lanky general officer had been sitting in there now for a quarter of an hour, and in the passage outside were three Excellencies and six newly appointed colonels marching up and down. It would be half-past one at least before he could get in. Puh!

Hans Heinz was therefore not displeased when Zillner entered ; after all, it was a good thing now and again to exchange views with a man of some degree of intelligence.

'Hail, Prince of Poets,' cried Zillner cheerily. 'Well met.'

'Well met in a solemn hour,' returned Sarapatka. 'I 'm sorry to hear you 're applying for active service.' He seemed indeed to look on it as matter for reproach. 'There 's a senseless uncertainty of life about the front. Blind death in ambush everywhere, thrusting out its clammy grip haphazard, taking the wheat or the tares without distinction. Bullets flying, humming, striking—anywhere, whether in the brain of a Goethe, or the body of a *crétin,* is left to chance. It is ridiculous. Whatever made you do it ? '

Zillner stared in blank astonishment at the smooth, colourless face of this maker of books, with his theatrical pose. 'What on earth—you, my dear fellow, to talk like that ? You, our Tyrtæus. The most fiery advocate of war yourself ? After all you 've written about waking the warrior spirit of old—what was it—in the sordidly mercantile minds of our modern youth. And commissioned by the Ministry to write out fiery proclamations . . . well . . . '

Hans Heinz smiled. 'How excited you are to-day. Really, there 's nothing to wonder at in that. Surely a man can write what he feels as his earnest conviction without being called upon to prove it with his blood ?

We who supply the intelligence of the nation are surely not to be used as targets like any common citizen. We have our spiritual work to do, our higher place to fill, while the man in the street '—he snapped his fingers airily—' if he dies, well, it means at the utmost the loss of a possible contributor towards the maintenance of the race. And that only if he is a suitable subject for the purpose.'

'Oh, well, if that 's your way of looking at it—I can't think, though, whatever made you take up a commission.' Zillner's disgust was evident. He looked the other straight in the eyes, and asked point blank: 'Where do we come in—as officers? How are we to persuade our men of the duty of giving their lives for their country, if we clear out ourselves as soon as it comes to the pinch?'

'Really, you know, this is quite—er—aggressive.' The poet seemed not in the least abashed. 'I hardly care to argue in such a tone, but still—*mutatis mutandis*, a king has other obligations than a coachman. Take the General Staff, for instance. Would our leaders there expose themselves merely for the sake of example? No—they have more important duties. And so have we. We '—his face assumed an air of conscious superiority—' we, the creative artists of the world, our place once empty cannot be supplied from among the common herd. And that is why, as I said, I am sorry to hear you are going to the front. It would be an easy matter to get you a post on the staff. Or you might come over to us in the Press Department? A man of your talents—there would be not the slightest difficulty. If you like, I could speak to the Chief about it to-day.'

'Thanks,' said Zillner coldly, and the corners of his mouth twitched. 'Much obliged to you, I 'm sure. But I 'm afraid I shouldn't care to do my soldiering in that way. And now, if you will excuse me . . . '

He saluted curtly, and went out.

Hans Heinz Sarapatka looked after him, shaking his head. Queer case of violent infatuation for regimental work—it was something outside his experience. The psychological aspect of the thing interested him, he found himself considering it as ‘ copy ’ ; it would make a neat short story. Then he returned to his proclamation ; a most important comma might, he fancied, be transposed to advantage—to attain the full and harmonious effect. . . .

Zillner passed down the long corridor towards the entrance. A clerk from one of the ministerial departments came out from one of the many doors, glanced at his service uniform with weakly blinking eyes, and hurried past, busy with his own affairs, walking lopsidedly from the weight of the bundle of documents under one arm, and glad that he was not called, at any rate for the present, to exchange his office stool for the saddle. If later on . . . well, no doubt he would manage somehow. Poor ghosts, thought Zillner. Flitting about behind closed doors, in artificial light, while outside the sun shone down on sabres and rifle barrels, guns and broidered colours. Poor ghosts. Trotting about on their little errands, glad of the measure of security yet left them, while all about the world, the clear light of heaven was reflected in the eyes of millions of earnest men. But three days back he too had sat there, a petty soul, occupied only with dusty papers, his sabre a clattering anachronism at his side. And to-day all that seemed impossibly distant and unreal. Thank Heaven, it was different now. His sabre was no longer a trumpery thing, a superfluous article of dress, but a sword . . . a sword.

. . . .

That afternoon he sat at home in his rooms, writing letters—polite notes for the most part, briefly announcing his departure, or business letters, arranging for the disposal of his effects, and the like. There came a ring at the bell. He had sent the servant out to make some final purchases, and opened the door himself.

It was Clarisse.

The two stood facing each other in the semi-darkness of the hall. Then Zillner opened the door to the drawing-room, and stammered out an invitation.

‘You are going away—to join your regiment ?’

‘Yes.’

‘When ?’

‘This evening.’

Gradually he mastered the embarrassment which had at first left him speechless. She looked past him across the room ; a rose in the lapel of her grey travelling cloak moved up and down, up and down. . . . Then she spoke again, in the easy tone of polite conversation.

‘This would be quite ridiculous, of course, if it were not for the war. As it is, there is nothing strange. I hope—as old friends—Well, you understand, of course.’

‘It is most kind of you . . . ’ he murmured weakly. The easy self-possession of her manner brought back his old confusion.

‘I don’t like the idea of your going to the front. Kreutzen will take you on his personal staff. It is all arranged.’

‘But I . . . ’

‘You will not need to move in the matter. But perhaps you do not care about it ?’ Her voice grew suddenly hard.

‘I thank you—but I would rather not.’ He bent and kissed her hand, that trembled as he took it.

‘Why not ? A word from me, and you will be transferred at once.’

‘I should prefer to do my soldiering with the regiment.’

‘Then you are very foolish indeed. You may be killed . . . ’

‘Pardon me, but—that is my own affair.’

The trembling rose on the grey cloak ceased moving for a moment. ‘Yes, you are right. Well, then—good-bye.’

For the fraction of a second he felt his hand in the clasp of something cool and vibrating, then it passed.

‘Clarisse !’

There was the sound of a door closing outside.

'Fool!' was his first thought. He flung himself down on the sofa, staring before him blankly, furious with himself. Fool that he had been. She had come and offered to serve him, and he had thrust her away. He had behaved like a brute into the bargain. He sprang up and strode about the room. . . . Yes, it was plain, she loved him. Another would have. . . . No. He stopped dead, looking up in relief. 'The soldier's farewell'—romantic apotheosis with kisses and tears. After all, he was glad it had not come to that. He sat down at the writing-table, and lit a cigarette, inhaling the smoke in long draughts. That last touch of her hand. . . .

Gradually a warm sense of satisfaction came over him. His accusing pride was appeased. She loved him—she would always love him. It rang through all his nerves as from tiny silver bells. How rich life was; richer than he had dreamt.

. . . .

Stefan, the servant, returning from his errand, was surprised to find his master striding cheerfully about the room and singing. 'Might think it was a wedding,' he grumbled to himself, 'instead of all this going to the wars. Nothing to sing about that I can see. If only it was all over and done with—well, well. . . .'

'Stefan!' The voice of command brought Stefan back from his pacific meditations to the stern reality of the moment. 'Got everything packed? Sure there 's nothing you 've forgotten now?'

'It 's all there all right, sir.'

'Cab then, sharp.'

Ten minutes later the two drove off, followed by the tearful blessings of the porter's wife, through the busy streets of Vienna, to the station.

CHAPTER II

The barrack yard was filled with a motley crowd. Here orderly blocks of men, formed up already into companies, and waiting for their equipment; there irregular groups of those who had just come in. Here was a face still aglow with a copper-coloured flush from the last tavern; there a pale slum-dweller, fresh from his weaver's bench, and still all confused by the sudden change. Many of the youngsters took it gaily, with bright anticipations of adventure. War? Well, they would do something, at any rate. And each was sure that he at least would come back safe and sound. All were furnished with a last loving tribute from those at home; bundles of food tied up in handkerchiefs of red or black or blue. Outside the gates, where the sentries marched up and down, stood the bereaved: peasant women, shapeless of figure, with gaudy-coloured skirts and head-dress; factory girls in threadbare city clothes; red-cheeked kitchenmaids, still snivelling a little at the recollection of that last bitter-sweet kiss. . . . There were old women too, still standing there and staring—staring at the gate through which *he* had disappeared, because the Kaiser had called him. . . .

But the pitch-black clouds of mourning that brooded over the flock of sensitive women without the gate failed to depress the men within. The sense of a common fate built bridges of acquaintance rapidly, and there were many also who knew each other from the workshop or the factory. The regiment was recruited from an industrial town, and consisted chiefly of mechanics, pale workers drafted from the cloth factories and machine shops, where as boys they had been filled with socialistic doctrine, and had learned to regard the structure of modern society and capitalism as an injustice to themselves. Such men are not the best material for soldiers in any State. But a surprising change had taken place in these born agitators, who in times of peace bowed grudgingly to the Moloch by which they were ruled. Many were frankly delighted at the prospect of war; it would, at any rate, be a change from the dull sweating monotony of their ordinary life, it offered them new experiences and wonderful possibilities. More remarkable still, all were agreed that the war was just. The deputies of their party had assured them that it was a war against Tsarism, the most powerful enemy of the 'Internationale,' and of the rights of free men. And each man felt himself now as called upon to take a direct part in executing the sentence; as a part of the strong hand that was to deal its crashing blows against the bloodstained giant of the north. The press, too, had done wonders in the way of influencing public opinion; even national differences seemed forgotten. The hot-blooded youths who a month back had railed furiously against everything German in the State, were now to be seen chatting amicably with their German comrades in arms. And there were many of these in the Tiefenbacher Regiment, burly, florid-faced peasants from the German-speaking districts round, their rustic colour contrasting sharply with the workshop pallor of the rest.

The barrack was filled through all four stories with restless bustle and noise. It was no small task. In three days, three thousand naked civilians had to be transformed into soldiers fully equipped to take the field. The stores poured out a stream of new grey clothing, knapsacks, footwear, and dull-glinting rifles. The wealth that had been years accumulating flowed now as if inexhaustibly from the depots, to be distributed among the waiting men. Staff-sergeants went about swearing and perspiring, orderlies rushed hither and thither on their errands, fatigue parties staggered under heavy burdens, and the rooms and corridors were humming like a hive. Stacks and bundles of material, underclothes, weapons, ammunition, were everywhere. And like spiders in their webs, with innumerable threads running out to every side, and crossing intricately here and there, sat the company commanders in their offices, with details of the mobilisation arrangements before them. Now and again they would check or divert some part of the machinery when the pressure seemed to threaten overheating; at times one less efficient would manage to bring the whole thing to a temporary standstill, when excitement or impatience led him to interfere in the chaos below.

Among these unfortunates was Captain Remigius Hallada, of Company Three, trotting about the office, wringing his hands, and peering through his misty glasses. 'We shall be last again, I know, if things go on like this. Last again. But what can you expect, when the non-coms. are never in their proper places? . . . Good heavens, man, aren't those identifications ready yet?' He glared furiously at the wretched clerk, who was scribbling away till he could hardly see. '*Zu Befehl, Herr Hauptmann*—be ready—in a moment.'

'In a moment—and how many more? Oh yes, they 'll be ready by the time the war 's over, and we 've buried the lot of them without. And then we shall have the same old story: "Company Three as usual." As usual. And why? Simply because Company Three happens to be cursed with a set of lame-fingered scribblers that can't or won't learn their work. Good heavens . . . ' He dashed out of the office and over to one of the barrack rooms, where the men were busy with their kit. 'Now, then, what 's all this? Get along, get along. Heavens, what a lot! Get along, for heaven's sake. What? What 's that man doing sitting on his cot? Thinks it 's a lounge—when he ought to be working his fingers to the bone. Oh, we 'll see about that. Wait till we 're once at the front, and we 'll see, we 'll see . . . '

Hallada was a kindly soul at other times, but at the moment he presented the distressing spectacle of a man attempting to avert catastrophe by interfering here, there, and everywhere. Company One had a commanding officer of a different type. Captain Franz Pfustermeyer was a portly man, with the blessed gift of taking things coolly, and submitting with imperturbable calm to what appeared to be his fate. 'It's all the same when you 're dead,' was the essence of his philosophy. 'So why hurry ?' He was the senior captain, and the fattest company commander in the regiment. The declaration of war did not seem to have affected him in the least. What must be must, and there was no use, as he put it, in standing on one's head. He was never known to hurry, and he rarely raised his voice, but preferred to do things quietly, and without haste. Now and again, some less phlegmatic superior officer would take him to task for slackness, but he merely listened politely, and quoted Götz von Berlichingen in his defence.

The model company commander was Lothar Edler von Grill, of Company Two, called by the men, for some reason or other, 'Black Dog.' Capable, sharp as a razor, and a strict disciplinarian, he had his men perfectly in hand at all times. There was never any hitch in the work of Company Two ; all went on with the regularity of clockwork. A model company commander—the Brigadier himself had said so. There were some who might have preferred a less perfect state of things. The men knew him as one who would stand no nonsense, and young subalterns were not always pleased to work under him. But there was no denying that Company Two was the smartest in the regiment. Grill set no store by popularity; all talk of ties of affection, and winning the hearts of one's men, he simply laughed at as nonsense. The average man was a rascal, and to be treated as such. Dealt with according to that principle, he would acknowledge his master, and develop such qualities as rendered him of any use at all—it was the only way. Grill was unmarried, and quite alone in the world, and his dominant passion was ambition.

Zillner had been appointed to Company Four of the first battalion, having received his third star on joining. 'The men are a decent lot, and sound at bottom,' the Colonel had said on his arrival. 'But you 'll have to keep them well in hand. Not a question of nationality, you understand—we 're all Hapsburgers here—but all this Socialist agitation, and that sort of thing. There 's one man you might keep an eye on . . . what was his name . . . ?'

'Jaroslav Nechleba,' prompted the Adjutant at his side.

'Yes, that 's the man. Nechleba. A nasty customer. Quarrelsome. Makes a lot of trouble. Keep an eye on him.'

The company fell in, and Zillner walked down the ranks noting the faces of the men, old and young. And he had singled out the fellow at once—a big man with greyish hair. The conscript looked up with a peculiar smile, as if saying to himself: 'Got his eye on me already—all right. I don't care if he has.'

. . . .

For three days the barrack roared and shook and swelled. But on the third day it seemed to burst, and from its belly trailed out a mighty, dull-grey, glistening, snake-like thing: the Regiment.

. . . .

'*Nazdar!* Hurrah, hurrah! *Nazdar!* Hurrah!' The cheers in two hostile tongues were blended in the air, embracing, whirling away together in a wild dance through the streets. All the blessings and prayers, and the hopes and curses seemed to ring in the words, as they rolled out in mighty waves of sound before the marching men. The home was crying the last farewell to its sons on their setting out; the home that stayed behind, numbed, impoverished and helpless. Through a cloud of joyous acclamation, the Tiefenbacher Regiment made its way to the station. There were numbers of civilians in the ranks—if ranks they could be called. The uniformed men made a narrow grey strip in the roadway, interwoven and fringed with gay colours and fluttering shapes. Girls and matrons had edged their way at all parts into the body of the column, till there seemed more women than men, and every warrior appeared a Mormon. Love tokens were evident also at the windows above; handkerchiefs waving like pale flames, little paper flags of red, and white or black-and-yellow came fluttering down through the air; there was a rain—a waterspout—of flowers. The marching men stuck the tiny scented things into their coats, or into the barrels of their rifles, and tramped bravely and proudly over those that fell beneath their feet.

The officers were hopelessly wedged fast in the crowd, and could only move with it, nodding their thanks to every side, waving their hands or lifting their swords to salute. The subalterns were wreathed and hung with flowers—the dainty little hands at the windows naturally aimed rather at slender youth than, for instance, at portly Captain Pfustermeyer, though he too received his share, despite all attempts at warding off the trifles. In the midst of the throng waved the regimental colour, a faded glory of silk, still bearing its earliest broidered device: '*Atzeytt für des Reiches Herrlichtkeytt*'—a motto dating from the War of the Succession, and preserved through hundreds of battles since.

The avalanche of men rolled on towards the great square, the band now striking up a catchy march tune, to deaden the shouting of the crowd. But it was all in vain—the music was overpowered and torn to rags, and the monster of sound kept on with its incessant '*Nazdar*—Hurrah.' At last, when the column had passed in to the square itself, the tumult abated. The Bishop was there already, standing in front of the little altar used on active service, and surrounded by ministers, and civil and military dignitaries. The crowd was held back now by a strong force of police: a word of command was heard, and the regiment formed into battalion squares. A deep silence followed, and the solemn Mass commenced. The Bishop held out the monstrance, and three thousand soldiers' hearts felt the presence of God, or, at any rate, of something great and unspeakable. A solemn tension among the listeners, and then, alas, only a fat man mouthing out colourless phrases; professional banalities of duty to the country, and the blessing of God. A speech, nothing more; sordidly poor and commonplace in itself, and delivered with lofty episcopal unction. Zillner listened impatiently; the presence of God had vanished, and the gentle revelation of the monstrance was gone. These priests—why could they not be content to serve God as His ministers, in silence? Dignity of movement, costly robes, these were well enough, and did not mar the artistic symbolism of the ritual which allowed each worshipper to find God in his own way. But always they must speak aloud—and their words made only vacancy in the heart; an emptiness wherein God could not live. . . .

At the first notes of the national anthem, Zillner's impatience vanished, giving way to a thrilling wonder of intense emotion. All stood motionless; the sobbing of many women rose like one great sigh over the square.

Once more the Bishop raised the holy symbol, the prelate now playing only a minor part in the showing forth of the Divine. And the miracle of self-forgetfulness wreathed its halo about the thousands there. Then the Radetzky March crashed out, calling them back once more to reality.

The regiment marched past, before none other than the General of Division, His Excellency von Feldkirch. '*Au revoir* in Galicia; *au revoir*,' cried the dapper General . . . and then the avalanche of the crowd closed in once more, still closer now, about the men they were soon to lose. Again the furious cheering, and again a deluge of flowers. . . . A couple of streets more, and the railway station came in sight, surrounded by a treble cordon of police. There it stood, a mighty, impassive monster, drawing the grey snake closer, swallowing it up. A sea of human beings foamed up towards it, broke on the wall formed by the police guard, and poured back again. Then, with a dull murmur, it ebbed away, as the last of the Tiefenbachers disappeared under the arch.

CHAPTER III

Rumble, rumble . . . good-bye to all—to all—to all. . . . Zillner's thoughts followed mechanically the dull thump of the wheels against the track, and the train steamed slowly out of the station. Wearied with the excitement of the last few hours, obsessed by a kind of primitive association between the heavy, unwilling drag of the wheels at starting, and the lingering reluctance of a farewell clasp, he found himself repeating again and again, 'Good-bye . . . good-bye . . . good-bye' . . . until the train gathered speed. He glanced absently out of the window; the city was already veiled beneath the smoke of its many chimneys, and disappearing a murky, greyish fog. Then brown and yellow stubble fields hurrying past dark-green vineyards, and peaceful white villages here and there. Fertile soil, drowsing under the blessing of the sun. But wherever human figures appeared in the shimmering stillness of the landscape, all turned suddenly to life and movement. To-day the peasant had thrown off the idle apathy he shared with his fields; his eagerness made a striking contrast to the full-fed ease of the country round. As soon as a man sighted the train, he would halt in his walk, or cease his work, and wave a hat or an arm as it rushed by, and shout up: 'Safe return—safe return.' All along the line there were groups of people gathered by the fencing rails; girls and children, mothers and old men, shouting and waving their hands, staring after the train as if to hold it: 'Safe return—safe return.'

The big waggons where the Tiefenbachers sat, thirty to each, gave back a fainter echo. The men were tired, and had begun to settle themselves as comfortably as they could. Many were already asleep, breathing thickly with the fumes of beer. . . .

Every cottage near the track had the black-and-yellow flag waving from the roof, or thrust out from a window by the inmates.

'Rather like travelling through a newly discovered *kaiserl. und königl.* fairyland,' observed Zillner, with a smile to his companion opposite.

'Exactly,' agreed Lieutenant Jaroslav Spicka, with a tinge of anxious deference towards his superior officer. 'If it would only last.'

'I don't see why it shouldn't.'

'I hope it may, of course,' said the Czech, stroking his black hair, already a little greyed at the temples. 'But one can't help thinking, after all, that Russia is an enormous country, with a population . . .'

'We are putting our heart into the work—that 's more important than numbers.'

'But—when the numbers are so immeasurably superior, will that suffice ? '

'You will soon learn, sir,' said Zillner sharply, 'how to make it suffice.' The other's scepticism annoyed him. He glanced round the carriage. There was Lieutenant Dr. Freischaff, lecturer in Romance languages at the University of Vienna, a blond-bearded man, with kindly blue eyes and gentle studious face. He wore a new gold ring on his right hand—very new and very bright. At the farther window sat the two young ensigns, Walter von Prager and Geza Andrei, talking together in whispers. Prager had been called up from the studies he had but just commenced—he was going in for the law ; the other had come straight to the regiment from the Military College at Budapest. He was still hardly more than a child, with pink and white cheeks, and but the first shadow of a moustache. The two young men seemed engaged in an earnest dispute.

'Well, young gentleman, and what 's all the debate about ? '

The Hungarian looked his company commander straight in the eyes. ‘Why, sir, I was saying that the Russians have been hereditary enemies of the Magyars ever since the national disaster at Vilagos . . .’

‘National disaster. H’m. Learn that at school ?’

The youngster coloured. ‘One learns the facts, of course. . . .’

‘And draw your own conclusions. I see.’

Andrei glanced uneasily at his superior, uncertain whether perhaps his opinions might be unfavourably received. He pulled himself together, however, and said resolutely, ‘Surely, sir, no Hungarian could look at it otherwise.’

‘It ’s all nonsense,’ broke in Prager, with an air of authority, as befitting one acquainted with the law. ‘In the first place, the affair you mention happened sixty years ago, and can no longer be considered as a valid cause. Furthermore, the principles of establishment in the remaining half of the realm are altogether opposed to such recriminations. Consequently . . .’

‘Very well—I admit it. Let ’s talk of something else.’ Andrei made a gesture as if to dispose of the subject, and stole a covert glance at Zillner, who smiled pleasantly and looked out of the window. The youngster came to the conclusion that his captain was a decent sort, and mentally resolved to make a good impression at the first opportunity.

Zillner had taken a fancy to the little Hungarian, with his bright frank eyes and the delicate little vertical furrow between his bushy brows. A Hungarian. Yes—and Zillner fell to thinking of the Hungarians in general ; those troublesome children of the Empire. He knew their good qualities ; their gallant, ardent manliness, their chivalrousness and natural dignity. A noble race. But their chauvinistic fervour, their shortsightedness in all matters of common policy, rendered them difficult to deal with as a whole, Sternly wise in their internal politics, they were surprisingly narrow and mercenary in their attitude to questions which concerned the Empire ; the idea of any sacrifice for the general good was hateful to them. Upon one point all were agreed: peasant and minister, citizen and noble alike maintained that Hungary should become an independent kingdom, loosed from all ties that bound it to the Empire, with its own army, and unlimited freedom to manage its own affairs. There was no question here of any possible compromise; even the leading statesmen, while officially supporting the existing state of things, were at heart, as Hungarians, no less radical than the rest. And to complete the inconsistency, they had supported Austria's prestige, had declared enthusiastically for the war, and shouted their '*moriamur pro rege nostro*' to the Kaiser, with a voice that was heard throughout Europe. Yet every man of them would a while back have hailed with delight any serious weakening of the Hapsburg monarchy, if it had paved the way for the independence of the red-white-and-green. Austria dissolved into two halves, with two armies, each weak in itself, and with but the slightest bond between the two—the Hungarians would have liked nothing better. It was vain to advance logical arguments against the madness of a suicidal policy which must inevitably imperil the very existence of Austria as a Great Power—and Hungary's share in the same—while there were enemies enough always ready to take advantage of it. The nation stood as one man upon the question; all felt it still as an ineradicable disgrace that they should have been forced to lay down their arms in '48, and see their country 'subjugated.' The wound was not healed yet. Zillner had once served in a Hungarian regiment, and knew many of his old comrades still; first-rate fellows, and excellent soldiers. But whenever the talk happened to turn upon these two things, the 'disaster' of 1848 and the question of Hungarian independence, these officers of the *kaiserl. und königl.* army were transformed in a moment to stubborn Magyar patriots, insensible to all other considerations—and it was best to change the subject, if possible. This apart, however, there were no better or more devoted soldiers to be found. A strange people!

Even this little cadet—Zillner cast a glance at the two young subalterns, who sat each in his corner, picking the last bones of a chicken they had shared—even this beardless youngster, fresh from a military kindergarten, was just the same. Evidently, it was something which they imbibed with their mother's milk. It was hopeless to think of eradicating that. Truly a strange people!

. . . .

The train was passing through a rich flat country; a landscape of broad plains, good to look at, but a trifle monotonous in its unvarying fertility. Corn-fields in endless succession, and nothing else. And everywhere the peasants greeting them with the same old cry, wishing them a safe return. . . .

The sun went down. The train pulled up at one of the big junctions, where the line turned off to the north. The Mayor and Council had turned out to meet the troops, the Veterans' Union was there with its banner, and women and girls offered refreshments. The men were given permission to leave the carriages, and hastened to secure a share of what was going; ices and lemonade, sausages and cigarettes.

Suddenly Zillner heard some one on the platform calling him by name, and a moment later caught sight of his battalion commander, Major Blagorski. 'I must ask you, Captain,' said the Major sternly, 'to look to your men. Keep them better in hand, if you please.' Zillner hurried the delinquents into their waggons again. 'For the future, I must request that company officers will look after the men at every halt, day or night, and take care that none of them are missing.'

'Very well, sir.'

'And you might come back with me now, if you please. I have a few words to say to the company commanders.'

Zillner went back to the first-class compartment, and found several of his brother officers there with notebooks ready; Pfustermeyer making shift with a crumpled scrap of paper and an inch of chewed lead pencil. Notebooks, apparently, formed no part of his field equipment.

The Major cleared his throat. ‘Well, gentlemen, if you please, I have sent for you that we might have an opportunity of talking seriously together—I trust we may frequently be able to do so later on. Some of us’ —this with a glance at Zillner—‘have only recently taken up their regimental work again, and may have lost touch with it a little. There are one or two things, then, which I would beg you to note. First of all, the most important is the internal administration, so to speak. It is the backbone of a regiment, and I may say that the Colonel attaches particular importance to this.’

Then followed a long series of instructions concerning various details of company work—kit inspection, care of health, order and relaxation of order on the march, and so on, with hundreds of petty details, calculated to make a soldier feel himself as a child in leading strings; a whole strait-waistcoat of ‘hints’ and ‘suggestions’ which left him no room to breathe.

‘And, then, gentlemen, one thing—the most important of all.’

Pfustermeyer groaned. He had used up his scrap of paper, and was struggling with his second shirt cuff.

‘The most important of all is this: the men must not be allowed to get slack in matters of cleanliness and order; not even in the field. They must have time given them to clean themselves and their kit. You will therefore, if you please, instruct platoon commanders to inspect the men regularly, every day, after getting in. During the rest, of course, during the rest.’

Zillner glanced up for a moment at the kindly, worn face of the old soldier, with its hundred tiny wrinkles, that told of a life spent in unnoticed toil and struggle. There was a touch of entreaty in the restless eyes, that seemed to say: ‘Don’t make things harder for me than you can help. If anything goes wrong, I shall get the blame, so do what you can to help me through.’ There was nothing domineering in his face; only a nervous anxiety.

It was pitiful to see. The man had been brought up in a school of dependence fitting him for a subordinate command; his whole life had been passed in leading strings, under constant supervision, meeting with little consideration from his superiors, until there was not an atom of independence left in him; his one thought was to avoid censure. And there were many like him in the service. It was this hopeless narrowness and constraint of regimental work, its lack of all wider scope, which had led Zillner from the first to seek employment elsewhere. And now, despite the war, he found it all unchanged. The same routine—and nothing else could be expected, for the war, which was to make a clearance of so much petty detail, had not touched them yet. But once in the firing line. . . . The thought of this man actually under fire filled Zillner with a sudden compassion.

'One thing more, gentleman, if you please.' The Major settled his glasses on his prominent nose, and fumbled nervously with his notebook. 'Kindly note, if you please, that after an engagement, inspection will be made four hours after the conclusion of the action. I think that is all. Has any one questions to ask?'

No one spoke. Hallada shook his head. Grill stared inscrutably before him. Pfustermeyer was contemplating his closely written notes with much satisfaction.

'Thank you, gentlemen, then that is all.'

The company commanders rose, clicked their heels, and left the compartment, Zillner and Pfustermeyer last.

'Very tame—very tame,' said the big man. 'Manage things differently when I get my step. Every man's toenails cut square and fingernails round, and branded with the company mark; little grey flag stuck in the seat of his trousers—then the bigwigs can see for themselves. Ahem! One of Pfustermeyer's men. Fine fellows. Can't mistake 'em. What d'you think of that? Good idea, eh? So long.'

. . . .

The night seemed glaring with hot, fierce eyes at the train as it rushed along—they were passing through the mining districts of North Mähren, and the furnaces were in full blast. Now and again flames would shoot up from the chimney, lighting the sky, and showing a confusion of factories and pipe lines, a writhing ugliness in the darkness below. At other times, only a thin white streak of light was visible, through which something seemed peering wickedly. Zillner glanced round the compartment; his companions had fallen into a dose. The Czech at least was not troubled by dreams of war; his face, full in the light from the half-covered lamp, wore a satisfied, half mischievous smile. The two young subalterns had curled themselves up like hedgehogs, each in his corner; their calm, regular breathing spoke of temporary transfer to happier regions, where there are no troublesome superiors, and no disturbing questions of nationality. Their faces, smooth and young—ah, so happily young—were untroubled by dreams: they slept as boys do, with a clean and deep forgetfulness. The linguist seemed less comfortable: he muttered in his sleep, and his lips twitched from time to time.

Zillner went back to his place. Poor Freischaff—thinking no doubt of his young wife. A stern thing, to have to leave her alone. He thought of Clarisse. Had she been in his mind these last few days? No, he had almost forgotten her in his work. Clarisse! There had been so much to think of, and to feel, these last few days. He had said good-bye to everything to-day; not to one woman alone, but to his life as it had been. There was no woman in whom that life was concentrated. Clearly he did not love her. At any rate, not as Freischaff, for instance, loved his wife. Love—something sufficient in itself, obliterating all else. What, then, was his feeling for Clarisse? His dreams that night gave him the answer. He saw her in all her naked loveliness, her deep rich eyes burning as they looked into his, her moist red lips with their warm kisses. . . . Clarisse was in his dreams that last night of peace. But in the morning, the dreams were gone, and Zillner found himself wondering what Freischaff really felt like. Strange—to be constantly thinking of a woman—hugging her picture day and night, always the same. It must be a cruel thing to love like that.

. . . .

That morning the train drew up at the first large station in Poland. A living hedge of peasant folk surrounded them, all very dirty, and staring open-mouthed at the uniformed men. On the platform were Jews in greasy caftans, smiling humbly, with something like a gleam of hope in their melancholy eyes. But there were some whose glance was fierce with a passionate hate, as if calling down curses on the tyrants who had hunted their brothers like dogs, and invoking the blessing of a stern Jehovah for these who had come to deliver them.

Polish ladies served tea with the inimitable grace peculiar to the women of that nation, and a charm of manner which made one overlook such trifles as the lack of a button here and there on their silk blouses, an occasional tear in their skirts, or the state of their high-heeled shoes.

Pfustermeyer was more critical. 'Snaky lot,' he grumbled, watching the women as they tripped smilingly on their errand. 'Skirts all in rags, and silk stockings under: every blessed one of them the same. I say though, that 's a neat little thing '—he pointed to a dainty brunette—'Not half bad, really. Interesting country. Scandalicia.' And Pfustermeyer proceeded to scandalise his companions by fantastic stories of the state of culture among the Polish nobility, dwelling with particular relish on the nature of their sanitary arrangements, which were, it appeared, promiscuous and casually extensive rather than hygienic.

The next halt of any duration was at Krakau. The beautiful old city had put on its war paint. Batteries, earth-works, and entrenched positions, with the soil but newly turned, appeared among the fir trees: in front of the citadel, men were at work upon a huge system of barbed wire defences. On the sidings at the station were trucks with heavy artillery waiting to be unloaded.

The train went on, through mighty forests and over sun-scorched plains, landscapes that seemed as if crushed under a weight of unspeakable distress, with grey pools of water here and there like melancholy eyes. There were great tracts of sandy waste, where nothing grew but patches of stubbly grass, and the Tiefenbachers were disagreeably surprised to note the indescribable poverty of the country. Then low undulations with a scanty growth of birch, and windmills reaching out arms towards all horizons. And in the midst of the desolation, a village here and there, in a hollow, with tiny rivulets of brown marshy water. The low, shambling cottages clustered together about the church as if in fear, like chickens cowering under the wing of a fat hen. Now and again, a big country house, or the palace of some great noble, broke the monotony, but that was all.

In the grey dawn of the third day the regiment detrained.

CHAPTER IV

'ADVANCE without delay.' The order had been flung out from somewhere in the rear, driving the masses of troops in huge columns towards the Russian frontier, On every road were long snaky lines of men, marching in clouds of dust . . . and after them, like centipedes, toiled the clattering supply columns. Ahead, far ahead, were the light cavalry, already in the enemy's country, riding hard on the heels of the Cossacks. The Russians were retreating all along the line. 'Ride them down,' was the word, snapped out like the crack of a whip over the hurrying men. This, too, was an order from somewhere in the rear, where a nervous restlessness seemed constantly urging on the advance. The plan of campaign devised by the genius of the General Staff, as laid down by Captain Zapperer that evening at the Konzert Haus, depended first of all on speed in its execution. Time was everything. If they could crush the enemy before he had time to bring up the bulk of his forces from the south, then the road to Kiev would lie open —for Ukraine, as every one knew, was already on the verge of revolt. Therefore . . . 'Ride them down.'

Again and again the whiplash cracked, driving the armies forward till they groaned under the pace. On and on, for days and weeks. Those at the rear, installed in comfortable mansions, sitting at their ease in shady gardens, they had chosen the better part. Swift cars were constantly coming and going, orderlies racing about and transmitting the infection of haste to this staff unit and that, and thence it passed on, multiplied through telephone and telegraph, to the troops themselves, eating its way into every corner of the giant body, till it burned with fever. And still the whip lashed out: ‘Advance, advance without delay.’

. . . .

The Tiefenbachers were having a hard time. The heat of those August days was terrible. The sun hung like a glowing ball in a sky of shimmering white, and each day's march was long; thirty-five or forty kilometres day after day. Feldkirch's division was marching as reserve, with the Tiefenbacher Regiment second in the endless column. In front of them were their comrades of the same brigade, the ‘Collalto’ infantry from Lower Austria. The men tramped painfully on through the fine, deep sand, which slithered away at every step. The weight of their equipment was a fearful burden in the heat, and for three days there had not been the slightest breeze to clear a little of the dust and sweat.

Zillner rode at the rear of his company, according to custom. The company officers had to be constantly encouraging, threatening, and driving on their men. Numbers of them had fallen out already along the road—reservists called up to complete the strength, mostly men of poor physique, who dropped like flies by the wayside. It was the sifting out of the chaff. Even the strongest plodded wearily along. From the day they had left the train, the men had been marching all day, for eight or nine hours in succession, without a meal until nine o'clock at night. They were unused to sleeping on the ground, and the small bivouac tents were but slight protection against the bitterly cold nights that followed the heat of the day. There was always a touch of frost to be seen at dawn.

Major Blagorski was furious. Twenty times a day he rode past, swearing angrily at the ranks that could not keep their dressing, or at some poor devil who had fallen out, and lay gasping, flushed and exhausted by the roadside. ‘No discipline; I never saw a marching regiment in such a state. Three days out, and thirty-five men gone already. The war will be over before we get there at this rate. But I 'll make them use their legs, the dogs. Any man not in his place at evening inspection will be put on extra guard. We must put a stop to this sort of thing—put a stop to it once and for all.'

Captain Hallada passed his fingers through his hair, all caked with sweat and dust. 'Put a stop to it—yes, yes, it 's all very well to say put a stop to it. But how is a man to do anything with a set of incapable non-coms. And the officers themselves are not much better.'

'Platoon commanders this way.' The junior officers hurried up. 'Gentlemen, there are thirty-five men missing. Consider the honour of the regiment. I look to you, gentlemen, to support me ; we must put a stop to it—once and for all.'

Poor Captain Hallada might have found comfort in the thought that even Grill's model company had to admit thirty stragglers, while Pfustermeyer's and Zillner's men showed a like proportion. What was the use of threatening them with punishment ? What use, either the orders against drinking from wayside puddles, or laughing in the ranks ? The men filled their water bottles in the morning, and had emptied them before half the day was through ; it was impossible to prevent them from dashing out to drink greedily of the muddy liquid ; the officers preferred to look another way. The Major himself would at such times glance anxiously at the Colonel, wondering whether he too saw, or really did not see ?

It was a hard time indeed for the Tiefenbachers, and they showed it. They dragged themselves forward, in silence for the most part ; willing to do their best, but with no energy left over for anything approaching cheerfulness. Only one or two of the stoutest fellows still marched with uplifted heads and untroubled eyes, chatting and singing as if in the best of spirits. There was Nechleba, the *mauvais sujet* of Company Four, whom Zillner had been warned against as likely to give trouble. He seemed unaffected by hunger or thirst ; carried an extra rifle most of the time to relieve some weaker comrade, and had a store of soldier songs which he hummed or sang, making the others join in. Strange, thought Zillner to himself, that a notoriously bad character could be so useful on the march.

In the evenings, when the air was somewhat cooler, and the field kitchens came up with an appetising smell of food, the wearied men brightened up a little. It came as a sudden change; and it was almost touching to see how these poor harassed creatures, after being driven forward all day like beasts with threats and curses, regained their bearing and courage as soon as their bellies were filled. The red-faced peasants laughed in simple contentment as their heavy jaws fell to work, and even the narrow-shouldered city contingent, with less stamina to bear up against fatigue, seemed filled with new life and energy.

The evenings were wonderful. The little camp fires twinkled all around, the cricket chirped, and here and there a horse whinnied in sleep. A whole town of grey tents grew up, and the moon came out, shedding its soft, kindly light over the parched earth. At times one could hear some popular melody, or an old folksong, from a camp near by. '*Prinz Eugen*' was a favourite song just then. Some of the Tiefenbachers were singing too: a few of them had gathered in a little group under the stars, and were singing the sweetly plaintive Czech song, '*Kde domow muj*'—their 'Home, sweet Home.' Wonderful evenings, despite Major Blagorski's inspection of emergency rations! Heaven help the poor sinner who could not show his reserve of biscuit or tinned meat. Discovery was inevitable, and punishment as sure. He was tied hand and foot, and lashed to a tree, there to stand for two hours, meditating upon the grossness of his crime. There were always a couple of such cases at every evening's camp.

On such nights Zillner lay long awake. His thoughts roamed far out in the gentle silence of the landscape, and a deep, reverent love grew up in him—a love such as he had never known before. And this new love spoke to him, and said: 'See, there they lie, these simple ones: the common men, the last and the least of all; souls that do not count. Driven and harassed, there they lie, and if one of them dies, it does not matter. There are always ten to take his place. But these little souls are ready to give up life for their country, though many that are counted great would never make that sacrifice. And they will die—many, many thousands of them will die. Emperors and kings should bend down in veneration before such as these, for they are the greatest and most terrible, the most unconquerable—they are the People. And you must love them, one and all of them.'

And Zillner promised.

. . . .

Early on the morning of the 18th of August, Feldkirch's Division crossed the Russian frontier with a thundering cheer. It was the Emperor's birthday, and the weather was loyally glorious. There seemed to have been a thunderstorm somewhere near; the air was fresh and cool. The troops, too, were fresher to-day, with some approach to enthusiasm; they marched with lifted heads, and there was a constant buzz of talk in the ranks. The officers were smiling, and even Major Blagorski had only once used his favourite epithet, 'You dogs!'

The Emperor's birthday!

And they were now in the enemy's country—this in itself was enough to raise the spirits of the men, wearied as they were by the heat. And all sorts of pleasant rumours were passed about. North of Krakau, the Imperial army had occupied a big tract of hostile territory; Warsaw was in a state of revolution . . . to the south, the Serbians were in flight, under hot pursuit. . . .

These and like reports flew as a gay whirlwind through the ranks, and all were longing now for their turn to come. Even the least warlike of them felt a new desire to take a part in it all, and an intense curiosity to see what it would be like. The Russians had certainly been trying their patience to the utmost. By all accounts they were falling back everywhere without waiting to give battle ; only a few small cavalry patrols exchanged shots with the scouting parties on ahead. And gradually these marching thousands began to feel something like a pleasant anticipation ; they were positively looking forward to the first engagement. War and the business of war—it was this that had driven them on through those toilsome marches, till their legs and shoulders ached, and they were longing now for the next act of the play.

Dinner that afternoon was a birthday feast. The officers sat in the shade of a straggly clump of shrubs, celebrating the occasion as far as circumstances allowed. The Major had contributed a couple of bottles of Kontuszowka, and Pfustermeyer had unearthed four bottles of Vöslauer. The one topic of conversation, of course, was the approaching battle.

‘ Gentlemen, we will not trouble about inspecting the rations to-day,’ said the Major, stroking his bushy moustache. ‘ Let us drink to a speedy victory, for the sake of the Emperor, our good old master.’ The wearied wrinkled face of the old soldier shone with an intense affection, which almost made it seem beautiful. ‘Honour and success to the First Battalion, gentlemen.’

The glasses rang loyally and boldly to the toast, and loyal and bold were the hearts of these men as they thought of their aged ruler, bowed and lonely in his villa at Ischl. And to complete the general festivity, that evening brought the first batch of letters ‘ on active service.’ Zillner had a card from Clarisse, wishing him ‘ Good luck.’ It was nice of her to send it. But the melancholy Dr. Freischaff was incomparably happier. He went off with his one little letter, and flung himself down behind a tree, and there he lay, reading it over and over again, with a look of joyful relief. Then he rose, thrust the letter carefully into an inner breast-pocket, and went back to the others.

‘ Aha, you ’ve come back to the world again ? ’ said Zillner kindly, offering his hand to his silent companion.

'Thanks, thanks—yes. She 's a plucky little woman—indeed she is.' There was a gleam of moisture in the student's eyes.

'Then you ought to feel all the pluckier for that.'

'Yes, I suppose so. But what makes it more difficult . . . the fact is, I 'm perfectly certain I shall never see her again. I can't explain it, but I feel it is so.' He stared at Zillner as if hoping that he could explain.

'My dear fellow, that 's all nonsense, you know. One mustn't give way to that sort of thing.' But he felt a sudden shiver as he spoke. What if the other were right? They were one and all of them face to face with death. . . . 'Nonsense, my dear doctor, nonsense.'

. . . .

Karl Albert Kraft came stumbling through the twilight over sand and tufted grass towards the camp. He carried a rifle on his shoulder, his face was sunburned, and his chin unshaven, and he looked extremely happy.

'I say,' he cried to Zillner as he came up, 'I 've just heard a queer piece of news.'

'Out with it then.'

Kraft unfolded the morning edition of a local paper from Mähren, and read: 'Southern Front. The General Staff reports as follows: Our troops, after victoriously driving the enemy from all positions, moved back to occupy their new lines, as "instructed."—What do you say to that? Sounds rather funny, doesn't it? Moved back victoriously to their new lines?'

'Sounds fishy,' said Pfustermeyer. 'Always the same. These bottle-green conjurers have a way of twisting things up till you don't know what is what. And the neater they put it, the more you can be sure there 's something wrong somewhere.'

'Might be a slip of the pen,' suggested Grill, but his face was thoughtful.

'Slip of the pen,' Pfustermeyer laughed scornfully. 'No, take my word for it, they 've sat and sweated over that little bit, half a dozen of them putting their heads together to make it look as decent as possible. Fishy, I say. Fishy at the start. Only hope the fishiness isn't going to keep on, that 's all.'

'In any case, gentlemen, it cannot be more than a slight temporary reverse.' The Major looked reproachfully at Pfustermeyer. 'You 're too pessimistic you know, really.'

It was finally agreed that the victorious retirement should be interpreted as favourably as possible. Nevertheless, it was impossible to deny that this was the 18th of August, and Serbia had not yet been laid at the feet of the Emperor, as the General Staff had prophesied would be the case. And if their plans for future operations were to be similarly discounted. . . . Well . . . Zillner did not care to pursue that line of thought, but resumed his cigarette.

Pfustermeyer changed the subject. He had been watching Kraft for some time with undisguised astonishment, and now he broke out: 'That 's it, of course. I thought there was something extraordinary about him. Armed to the teeth in this peaceful little camp—are you thinking of setting up as a brigand ?'

'Oh, well, you see, by all accounts, there are patrols of Cossacks about, and I thought if we should come across them, it 'd be just as well . . .'

'Cossacks ! Haha ! That 's good,' shouted Pfustermeyer. 'Cossacks ! . . . '

A little later Kraft rose and went back to his own lines. Zillner walked with him part of the way.

'And what do you think of it all ?' asked Zillner. 'The war, I mean ?'

'Think ? Think 's not the word. It 's a thing to feel, man. And I 'm feeling it all over. Never was so excited in my life. It 's grand. And the men—our fellows are simply wonderful. It 's all we can do to hold them in.'

'Well, we shan't have to much longer, I expect. Next time we meet we ought to have seen something more of it. So long.'

Zillner stood watching his friend, as he strode off, till he disappeared in the moonlit mist.

. . . .

They had not long to wait.

That same night the first shots were heard—from the outposts. A sotnia of Cossacks had tried a surprise attack, but were easily driven off. And then next morning, as the columns hurried forward in the dust and the heat, they heard, far off to the north, a dull grumbling as of distant thunder, which did not cease, but continued all that day and into the night. And soon all were aware that a battle was in progress to the northward; their fellows on the left were in action. But the march went on through the pitiless heat. The men were gradually getting into condition, and there were fewer stragglers now. The worst of them had fallen out at the first start. But there was new trouble ahead. A grey spectre lay in wait by streams and ponds, breathing out evilly at those who drank. It followed stealthily along their route, snatching a victim here and there, and torturing him. It was the dreaded plague, dysentery.

Then one night the division was roused on a sudden, no one knew why, and turned out for a march of thirty kilometres. The men were simply worn out, and staggered drunkenly. At daybreak, there was a halt for two hours, then on again all day without a break. But a little after sundown, when officers and men lay in a leaden sleep on the sand, utterly exhausted by maddening exertion, they were roused again, and marched out once more into the night. 'Tactical considerations,' it was understood, 'rendered a change of position desirable.'

Major Blagorski no longer insisted on kit inspections. Wearied out, he rode on grimly, and grimly the column trailed forward, night and day.

Pfustermeyer was furious. 'Those clever beggars at the rear seem to fancy they 're playing at Kriegsspiel with little tin blocks. They 'll find out their mistake before long, I fancy.'

Early one morning a big yellow bird, with a red and white pennant for a tail, flew high above the column. It kept far up in the blue sky, muttering faintly, and finally disappeared in the dazzling sunblaze to the eastward. Not long after, another came sailing down from the same quarter; it had black rings on the underside of the wings, with a big spot in the centre of each.

There was a whispering in the ranks: 'A Russian aeroplane. A Russian aeroplane.' All eyes were turned skywards, but the thing was far out of range. Then about noon, the sound of guns was heard somewhere ahead, from the direction in which they were marching. The Brigadier, a spectacled engineer, who had hitherto been suffered to blush unseen, came up with his aide-de-camp, and endeavoured to get on ahead of the regiment. The division commander, in his car, did likewise. The regiment halted, and took up a position in readiness behind a slight rise in the ground.

'Battalion and company commanders, if you please.' Colonel Breil was standing at the foot of the slope: his firm, soldierly features well composed, save for a slight twitch of the lips. 'The troops ahead of us are engaged with the enemy; our corps is to attack. The regiment is in reserve for the present. You had better prepare the men for what is coming, if you please. The regiment will keep up its reputation. I have no doubt of that. Thank you, gentlemen.'

Zillner looked at his men. There they lay, stretched out in the hot sand, and glad of a little rest. They were tired, he could see; there was more of resigned doggedness in their faces than of keen expectation. They had known all along that this must come. They would do their duty, there was no doubt of that; no fear of their bringing disgrace upon the regiment. But for the moment they would like to rest, to stretch their wearied limbs at ease; that was all they cared about just now.

In few words, Zillner told them what was coming. 'We are going into action, men. Show yourselves plucky as you have up to now, and we shall do.'

There was no loud demonstration from the men, but in two hundred and fifty pairs of eyes he read a determination to meet the inevitable with courage. Some of them—not many—showed more than the mere resolve not to play the coward : they were, he could see, full of an intense curiosity and desire for battle. He noted the few who took it thus. Among them was that same Nechleba, the black sheep of the company, with a wild gleam now in his eyes. And then the little cadet, Andrei ; he was keenness itself. 'Is it true, sir ? To-day, now, at once ? '

Zillner nodded, smiling at his enthusiasm.

'What a piece of luck. It seems too good to be true.'

And the boy turned away, with the little furrow deepening between his close-drawn eyebrows, and gazed like a young eagle out towards the horizon, where the roar of the guns was growing louder every minute.

Freischaff was sitting on the ground in front of his detachment, his face a trifle pale ; the Czech was staring darkly before him ; von Prager was smoking a cigarette with an indolent, careless air of being thoroughly at home.

The air was shimmering in the heat ; down in the hollow, it hung heavy and motionless, thick with the murmur of the ever troublesome flies. The heat seemed floating in visible clouds over the low range of hills that shut in the landscape to the north.

In the full blaze of the sun the regiment advanced, moving in companies and battalions forward towards the hills. Suddenly there was a faint rushing sound in the air, growing louder and louder, rising to a shrill whine above their heads, and then a dull report far off. A whirling column of dust rose up like a flame from the earth.

It was the first shell.

The men laughed. 'Try again—better luck next time.' But a moment after another shell burst fifty paces in front of the second company, spattering Grill, the immaculate, with earth and yellow dust. The companies went forward a hundred paces at the double.

A whirl of flying feet, and they flung themselves down once more, while the iron missiles sang in the air above. Now and again one struck the ground heavily, boring its way furiously into the earth, but doing no damage beyond scattering grass and sand. None of them as yet had reached the goal they sought—the warm, living bodies of men.

All weariness was forgotten now in the excitement of the moment. There was a play toward, and the spectators felt the thrill of something about to happen; something which as yet they did not understand. The men laughed when the shells fell wide, and jeered at the bad aim of the gunners. ‘Try again,’ they cried, ‘Try again,’ as the dust clouds sprang up like giants in the empty air, to the right, to the left, in front or behind. Forward. And now they could hear a sound as of a riveting machine, but faint as yet. In the distance—rifle fire. And all at once the sky in front of them was speckled with tiny white clouds. They faded away next moment into the blue, but more appeared, and more; they hung over the front of the company, and burst with a slight report. Shrapnel.

The stretcher-bearers were carrying the first batch of wounded to the rear. And there in the sand lay a corporal of Zillner's company, struck by the tube of a shrapnel shell in the head. ‘Urgh—urgh—urgh!’ he gurgled, and pointed helplessly to a glittering fragment of brass tubing that stuck out, framed in a reddening circle, from his right temple. A moment later he was still—the first to die.

‘God rest his soul,’ murmured Zillner to himself.

The Tiefenbachers worked their way breathlessly forward to the cover of a small gully. The little white clouds followed them, scattering out, as from a cornucopia, the leaden bullets and ragged fragments of shell that here and there brought death. The enemy's artillery was feeling its way about the field, but the regiment was well under cover now, and there were no more casualties for the present. From the rear, they could hear the roar of their own guns, that had come into action in support, the batteries being drawn up close behind the infantry position. And the Tiefenbachers could hear the jubilant song of their own shrapnel flung out against the enemy. The little white clouds in front grew fewer. Then, at five in the evening, the regiment moved forward to the attack. Two battalions extended, forming a thin grey line; the third, with the colours, was held in reserve. There was still no enemy to be seen. A little wood directly in front obscured the view, but the whine and scream overhead had risen to a higher note, that told of the shorter range. There was more rifle firing now. The bullets sang in a shrill treble, with here and there the duller hum of those nearly spent. A line of men lay in position at the edge of the wood, but they did not seem to be firing.

'Hang it all,' thought Zillner, 'why don't they advance with the rest?' He put his whistle to his lips, and gave a signal, and was about to follow it up with a shout to the line to advance, when he caught sight of the subaltern in command. He was lying huddled up behind a tree, with the glass held stiffly in his right hand, staring apparently at something ahead. But something—yes, a little black insect—was crawling undisturbed over his face. And all those others, lying in position, as if waiting the word to fire, with their cheeks pressed against the butts of their rifles, or with faces hidden in the grass—they were dead men.

Zillner felt a cold grip at his neck, and shivered. But only for a moment. Then with a wave of the hand to his own men, he cried out: 'Number Four Company—Forward.' With a sidelong glance at their silent comrades, they dashed out into the open. Volleys rang out, and the bullets sang over their heads, but fell harmlessly behind them, where the dead men lay. And machine-guns were searching the ground on either flank. 'Down!' They could see the enemy now—there on the next ridge, where the earth had been thrown up to form some sort of cover. Then—what was that? A wild cheer from the left, and bugles sounding the charge. The Collaltos were rushing the position with the bayonet. Zillner lifted his glass. Like a grey sea, with the flashing foam of the bayonets in front, the Collaltos dashed up the slope, flooded it, and swept like a breaking wave over the ridge. Shouts and flashes of fire in the confusion, and then a silence. And a moment later a joyful rattle of musketry as the enemy fled in panic. Tears rose to the eyes of the young captain as he watched. What would he not have given to be there. Heroes . . . heroes. . . .

A shrill whistle sounded, and he started up. 'Tiefenbachers forward!' The company dashed up furiously at his heels. Again a couple of volleys still over their heads, and then the machine-guns lopped off a dozen men from his left flank. There was no stopping now. The line of trenches ahead grew broader and clearer, and seemed to be hurrying up to meet them. With bloodshot eyes, and faces flushed and dripping with sweat, the Tiefenbachers flung themselves madly upon the enemy. But on reaching the line the gasping men found only corpses, and a couple of trembling *moujiks* holding up empty hands. The enemy was in full flight, scattered in ragged groups over the ground. A hail of bullets after them, and then the men flung themselves down in the empty trenches to get their breath. Their hearts were thumping violently, their lungs gasping. Victory!

Batches of prisoners were led past under escort, staring idly before them. The Brigadier came trotting up from the rear, blinking through his spectacles, and croaking out hoarsely: 'Finely done, Tiefenbachers, very finely done. We 're winning all along the line.'

Pfustermeyer's brick-red countenance shone with delight. 'Neat piece of work. Doing the thing in style. But the Collaltos had the best of it. A first-rate lot.'

The Major, too, ventured mildly to be pleased, 'Gentlemen, I assure you, very gratifying—very gratifying indeed. I think I may—yes—remit all punishments outstanding. That is to say, as far as the battalion is concerned. But, for Heaven's sake, don't interfere with any regimental cases—the battalion only, you understand.'

But there was a drop of bitterness in the cup of victory. Colonel Breil had fallen. The adjutant had just come up with the news. Fallen just as his men were dashing on to their victorious charge. It was behind the little wood where the dead marksmen lay; he had been hit by a stray bullet in the throat, and had died in a few seconds.

Who was to succeed him in the command? The officers were genuinely grieved at his loss, but there was a touch of self-interest in their minds. They would hardly get a better colonel in his place.

The men, dirty, dusty and worn, whispered eagerly together in the ranks, comparing notes, and exchanging views. It had been a great day, and there was much to talk of. Victory! . . .

CHAPTER V

At two in the morning, when the men were sleeping the deep sleep of exhaustion, Feldkirch's division was aroused once more. The Adjutant had just come back from division headquarters with the General's orders to follow up the pursuit of the enemy without delay. 'It is an independent action on the part of the division,' he whispered. 'No instructions from the Corps Commander, you understand, but a stroke of genius on the part of the General himself. If successful, it will reflect great credit on the division, and on all concerned.' Captain Würkner had a way of communicating any particularly interesting piece of intelligence in the official phrasing of regimental orders.

'Of course,' grumbled Pfustermeyer. 'We know what that means. His superlative Excellency 's got his eye on the next bit of ribbon—Order of Maria Theresa 's what he wants. Well, let him get it, it 's all the same to me.'

The men staggered up drunkenly, and stood by their piled arms. What a blessed thing it would be to get a full night's rest for once—only once. There was a shuffle and rattle as they hoisted the knapsacks on to their tired shoulders, and the grey snaky line marched off into the night. The stars were twinkling on high; the moon hung like a delicate silver sickle low down in the heavens.

Zillner rode at the rear of his company in a dreamy content, his eyes resting affectionately on the long lines of bowed and burdened men as they plodded on, grey shadowy figures in the darkness. His heart went out to the poor wearied souls; he felt as if he must whisper a word of thanks to each. Poor brave fellows! He felt an intensity of gratitude to them one and all. His company! There, flowing on ahead in a grey ribbon of steel, set with red hearts . . . red flames. . . .

Victory! How favoured he had been. A victory at the outset, and only twelve men down—only two dead. *They* were gone never to return, the two who had given their lives in the grand devotion of that splendid 'Forward!' But the others, who lay now carefully bandaged at the collecting station in the rear, those he might see again. When? Perhaps they might be in time to take part in the rejoicing at the final victory; the *Gloria in excelsis* for the last great fight that should bring them peace. If they could but go on as they had begun, it would not be long before the Double Eagle could feather its nest with the plumes of the giant Russian vulture. He smiled at the thought. Fortune had been kind indeed. He patted the mane of his chestnut: 'Bravo, Plutus! At them again!'

Suddenly, he heard a voice at his left hand—it was the fair young doctor, Freischaff.

'Captain, might I trouble you, I wonder, to do me a service?' The voice came thickly, as from a distance, through a thick veil, breaking hesitatingly upon his meditations.

'Certainly, certainly—if I can, that is, of course.'

'It 's just a little matter. If you would not mind . . . this letter . . . in case . . .' A trembling hand held out an envelope towards him.

'More presentiments, doctor. Really, you know, you mustn't give way like this. What is the matter?'

'Only that I know I shall not live through the day. That is all.'

Zillner took the letter. 'Incurable pessimist. I 'll give it you back this evening.'

The other shook his head sadly. 'I know better,' he said softly, and walked on with bowed head.

'Just a moment. How can a man of science ever bring himself to believe in such old wives' tales?'

Freischaff gave a little dismal laugh. 'It sounds ridiculous I know,' he said. And then almost in a scream, the words broke from him: 'But I feel it—I feel it. . . . And the letter is only to say that I shall think of her—only of her—in what comes after.'

'My dear fellow, you are overstrained. This has been too much for you. This evening, wait and see—we shall be laughing at this together.'

. . . .

A faint strip of red-gold light showed above the eastern horizon. A cold dawn wind swept over the plain, and here and there a bird chirped sleepily at the coming day. Far ahead the first rays of the sun lit up the gilded cross on the dome of a distant church.

. . . .

In the golden light of the early morning the Tiefenbachers came marching through a little village, where Ruthenian peasants stood in their doorways, making gestures of humble greeting as the troops passed. Outside the church stood the priest, a fat man, with a heavy black beard, his face all smiles and friendliness. The church bells were ringing, sending out dull, heavy waves of sound upon the morning air.

'That 's funny,' muttered Andrei in a half-whisper to Spicka, who was marching at his side. 'Wonder what they 're ringing for? Very funny, if you ask me. It 's not a Sunday, and they 'd hardly be ringing the church bells here to celebrate a victory of ours. What do you think it means?'

'How should I know?' answered the Czech sulkily. 'I wish they 'd call a halt. I 'm getting sick of this.'

'H'm. Funeral perhaps.'

Beyond the village the country spread out more or less flat, rising a little on ahead. Dry grass, sand and fields of thin stubble, with here and there a little copse—exactly as the country they had been passing through for days. As the tail of the company came out into the open—the first battalion was bringing up the rear, and Zillner's company was last—a windmill on the horizon, whose sails had been whirling merrily up to now, stopped suddenly. Almost at the same moment there came the scream of shells, and columns of dust were flung up in front. One rose from the midst of the third battalion—and in it were seen arms and legs, and a couple of heads, whirling up in a ghastly dance. From the eastern side of the village came the sound of firing. Treachery!

Hurriedly the men were got into open order. Zillner shouted through the confusion to Andrei: 'Take your platoon and search the place thoroughly. Show no quarter to any bearing arms, and if that priest is still alive, bring him to me.'

'*Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann!*' The boy drew himself up smartly, revolver in hand and breathless with excitement, the deep furrow between his eyebrows deeper than ever. 'This way, men—follow me.' His young voice rang out brightly as he hurried off with his men towards the houses. The firing from that quarter had already ceased.

Treachery! This was something new. Were there no scouting patrols out? What was the cavalry doing? thought Zillner, as the reserve battalion moved forward in rear of the regiment dashing towards the rise in front. There was a hail of shrapnel falling, and with much better aim than the day before. Already the ground was littered with suffering horrors. Could this be their beaten foe of yesterday? He thought of the Adjutant and his confidential communication: 'Stroke of genius . . . independent action . . . follow up the pursuit . . . great credit . . . ' Yes, of course. There had been no time to send out scouts in advance; even had they been sent, there would not have been time to warn the troops behind. They were following up the pursuit of a beaten enemy, to make the victory complete and crushing. But this was no beaten enemy before them now, with his artillery dotting the sky all over with bursting clouds. Anyhow, thought Zillner philosophically, if the enemy wasn't beaten yet, then they would beat him now.

The regiment had just crested the rise when orders arrived from the Brigadier to advance no farther, but entrench and hold the position there. The spades were soon busily at work. The men lay flat on the ground, and dug furiously with their short-handled tools, while the shells screamed overhead, and bullets showered down on them from the bursting clouds of the shrapnel. First shallow pits, then deeper hollows in the earth. The soil was loose, and easy to work in, and soon the firing line was well under cover. It was time ; for the enemy was sending volley after volley over their heads—too high now, and doing no damage. They could see the enemy now, some five hundred paces distant, a line of trenches just distinguishable through the glass. But the guns were flinging their raucous iron missiles from some invisible position far beyond. Still the columns of dust sprang up, often quite close to the trenches. And then a shriek of pain, a cry of invocation . . . and when the grey smoke cleared away, the stretcher-bearers could be seen, carrying back some shivering bundle soaked in blood. It was not a pleasant sight to watch. Where was our own artillery ? The same thought was in the minds of all. At last—after two hours of helplessness under the murderous fire, the welcome roar of the guns was heard from the rear. The poor wretches huddled up under cover began to breathe more freely. It was all right now. The first few shots struck the windmills ahead, scattering them in a whirl of burning fragments —no more of their cursed signalling from there !

Zillner's company lay in reserve behind a patch of gorse on a steep slope, giving very good cover, which they had further improved by spade work. The men sat in hollows dug out in the slope, and were thus more or less protected against the oblique fire from above. Zillner looked round. What was Andrei doing all this time ? Then he saw that the village where the church bells had rung so solemnly was now in flames. Ears and sheaves of fire, pale in the sunlight, were thrust out from the houses, and a wave of grey silky smoke rolled across the roofs towards the church. Then another grey wave below, coming nearer in an irregular line, pausing a moment and coming on again, and then dashing across to the foot of the slope—it was Andrei with his men.

The boy threw himself down by the side of the Captain.

'*Herr Hauptmann!* Beg to report—carried out instructions.'

'Good. And perhaps a little more?'

'H'm. Scoundrels were armed with Russian rifles. Priest had a whole arsenal of them.'

'And where is he now?'

'Dead. Tried to shoot—beast. And as there wasn't time for a formal execution among the rest, I just set the houses on fire and settled them that way.'

'Excellent! Bravo!' said Zillner, patting his young subordinate on the back. The boy was a born soldier. 'Get down under cover now; there 's no sense in exposing yourself here.' He would have been more than sorry to lose this bright little cadet; the very thought gave him a twinge of pain. But surely there must be some guardian angel for men like him.

'Oh, nothing 'll happen to me, sir. Mother prays for me, you know.'

His mother prayed for him. The boy might well be calm and confident. Zillner's thoughts turned to a little rose-bordered grave in the cemetery at Graz; if he could only kneel there once more and kiss the stone. . . . Happy boy, with a mother to pray for him. . . .

The shriek and whine of the shells, and the crackle of musketry, had grown more violent. An orderly, a long-legged corporal of Zillner's regiment, came rushing up. 'Battalion order, sir. The enemy is bringing up reserves, preparing to attack. The position here is to be held at all costs.'

Zillner's head was in a whirl. The enemy bringing up reserves and preparing to attack . . . ? But they were in pursuit of a beaten enemy; it was their place to attack. What could it all mean? He rose to his feet, and stared through his glass, while invisible missiles were buzzing all around him. There was no mistake—there they were, coming up from the right, three lines—four—hurrying up at close intervals. And from the ridge beyond, on the skyline, were still more of them moving forward.

The Austrian machine-guns were furiously at work, and from the right, where the Collaltos were posted, came a brisk rifle fire. On the left, where the line curved round gradually towards the west, another regiment, the Büttlers, had dug themselves in. The 105th and the Landwehr were still in reserve.

The Russians would meet with a hot reception anyway. But how came a beaten enemy to attack in that manner at all? Zillner could not get rid of the thought that troubled him. Hssss !—and his cap shifted over to one side, as if some hand had tried to snatch it off. The hint was unmistakable; he threw himself down under cover. The bullet had torn through just under the badge, between it and the peak.

The men lay in silence, each struggling by himself with the fear of death. And some crushed their terror between clenched teeth, or throttled it in a convulsive grip of their fists. Others there were who prayed, and their trouble was taken from them. One or two drove the spectre back by trusting to their luck—these were they who aspired to win renown. But there were many who gave way shuddering, and the terror caught at their hearts, a stifling thing . . . they huddled themselves up closer and closer under cover, and already death was in their eyes.

‘Some one coming this way, sir. Mounted orderly, it looks like.’ A keen-eyed corporal had sighted a man galloping up from the burning village, and making straight for where they were. ‘He ’ll never get through. It ’s madness to try it.’

The horseman kept on his way, dropping now to an easy canter, to all appearances as undisturbed as on manœuvres. The horse, a splendid Irish bay, pulled up close to where Zillner lay, and Lieutenant-Colonel von

Rutzinger, Chief of Staff of Feldkirch's Division, sprang from the saddle.

'For Heaven's sake, sir, get under cover.' Zillner pointed with an entreating gesture to the ground. 'We 're in the thick of the firing here.'

'Thanks, it doesn't matter now.' The Chief of Staff dropped the reins on the neck of his mount, and the animal stood with heaving flanks, sniffing at a tuft of grass. The Colonel stepped close up to Zillner, and whispered in his ear:

'Do me the favour to shoot me at once, if you please.'

'Sir!' . . . Zillner, still prone, swung round, raising himself slightly from the ground with one hand, and stared into the other's face.

It was the face of a dead man, save for the eyes, with their dark, commanding glance, and the twitch of a tiny furrow on either side of the mouth.

'Pardon, sir, but . . . but . . . ?'

'You must know why I ask. It 's an unusual thing, perhaps, but. . .' He hesitated a little, and stood swaying a little from the hips, a tall elegant figure. 'But I ask it as a favour. And, as a good comrade, you cannot refuse. Surely, when I beg you. . . .' His voice dropped to a tremulous whisper of entreaty.

'For Heaven's sake, sir, get down under cover,' repeated Zillner, utterly at a loss. 'You *will* be shot if you don't.'

The sand all round them was lashed by the bullets from the machine-guns. 'It 's no good. I 've tried. All the way out here—not a scratch. Come, Lieutenant, as a friend . . . it is the only way.'

The madman drew himself up to his full height, his face set in a smiling mask. 'It 's no good, you see. They won't touch me. And so I ask you, as a brother officer—as a last request . . .'

Zillner felt as if serpents were twining cold about his throat. 'The men, sir,' he whispered. 'It is impossible. . . .'

The men were already casting curious glances at the pair.

'Yes, yes, of course. I forgot. No, it 's no business of theirs. Though it hardly matters, as things stand. These fine old regiments—glorious traditions . . . and all lost—lost. . . .' He paused for a moment, and went on in a changed voice, as if indicating a report: 'The enemy is pouring masses of troops into Galicia by way of Kiev. We knew nothing of these dispositions. Lemberg has already fallen. I gave the order to push on, wishing to crush the enemy after his defeat of yesterday. But in the meantime we are outflanked on the south, and two army corps are pushing up to attack the position here—two army corps, in addition to the force already engaged. I knew nothing of all this, and his Excellency . . . '

'His Excellency?' Zillner stared blankly at the other.

'Dead. He understood that the position was hopeless, and shot himself. That was just before I came away.'

'And the position is hopeless?' Sand and grass and cowering men danced before Zillner's eyes, the whole scene rising and falling as to the beating of his pulse. 'There is no chance of . . . ?'

'None. And so I ask you, as a last favour . . . let me die by a comrade's hand.'

Zillner looked at the man, who stood there pale and earnestly insistent with his last mad prayer. And a feeling of harsh pitiless anger grew up in him as he thought of what it meant to himself. 'It is not for me to judge,' he said coldly. 'If you are looking for death—there is the firing line.'

'You are right—you are right.' The Colonel was shaking with hollow laughter. Close beside them lay an orderly shot through the head. 'He doesn't want it now,' he murmured, and bending down, he took the dead man's rifle and a handful of cartridges. 'Thanks, comrade.' And next moment he was galloping off towards the roar of the firing line, his elegant breeches fluttering in the wind of his pace. A crash, and horse and rider came to earth; the bay had been shot through the shoulder-blade, and lay with its muzzle full of grass.

. . . .

Zillner's brain was racked with a discordant chaos of untuned strings, with a deep insistent bass repeating 'Scoundrels! Scoundrels!' Their mad ambition, their brutal carelessness, was to be paid for now with the lives of thousands; thousands of lives sacrificed uselessly. And then they came to him, begging for death. What did he care how they died? He strove to collect himself. 'The position was hopeless.' But the man had been desperate when he spoke; his brain was gone. There must be some way out. Here were the men, good soldiers, well under cover in a good position. The ground sloped down in a natural glacis towards the enemy, without a ridge or fold beyond; the attack would melt away in crossing the open. Here was his regiment; its courage was proved. The brave fellows in their sand entrenchments would serve as well as a breastwork of steel. No, no, no—they would not give way, they would not falter. They would make up in pluck and endurance what others had forfeited by their idle selfishness. The firing had settled to a regular rhythmic beat. Zillner crept up on to the ridge, watching the ground in front through his glass. There lay the men in a long line, firing steadily; on the left were the Buttlers curving round towards the west. There was nothing to fear. And the Russians had not succeeded in carrying their attack very far as yet. For hours they had been lying there in close order, eight hundred paces away; through the glass one could see them working away with the spades to throw up further protection against the murderous fire. On the right were the Collaltos, who had done such splendid work the day before. The position was strong enough.

But what was that? . . . Something was going on out there; an uneasy movement among the men in the firing line. Reserves hurrying up and getting into position on the extreme right. And now masses of the enemy rushing up, and spreading out on the threatened flank, where the firing was growing more furious every moment. A desperate spurt from the machine-guns . . . and then the bullets began to fall among Zillner's men—from the flank.

'*Herr Hauptmann*—we are under fire from the right flank,' stammered Lieutenant Spicka, his eyes glancing nervously around.

'And what if we are, sir!' returned Zillner sternly, looking the other straight in the face till he turned away.

An orderly came hurrying up, bareheaded, and with the blood flowing in broad streams down nose and cheeks. 'Battalion orders,' he gasped out, and thrust forward a strip of paper with trembling hand. The writing was pedantically neat; the order ran: 'In accordance with instructions received. The right flank will retire. The first battalion will hold the enemy in check until the remainder have reached the next position. The whole battalion will move up into the firing line at once.—Blagorski, Major.'

Zillner turned and looked out towards the rear. The next line of defence was on the other side of the village. Between the two lines lay a small hollow in the ground, and a series of low ridges.

. . . .

Slowly, very slowly, the men crept out from the shelter of the pits. 'Smartly now, men!' Zillner had drawn his revolver. Those in front were already coming out from their cover. The first line retired, in good order to begin with, the officers leading. Then, after many had fallen shot from behind, and others were seen rolling down like hares across the ground, to lie gasping—then the rest gave way. Death was at their heels, reaching out at them with a thousand hands. In a moment they were in full flight, rushing across in little groups, and ducking as they went.

'After me! After me!' cried the officers. But finding the men did not heed, they ran at full speed themselves, on the heels of their men. Blagorski's battalion, covering the retreat, kept up a desperate fire against the close masses of the pursuing Russians. They began to waver. But on the right, where the Collaltos reserves were striving to keep their ground against a whole brigade, they were in danger of being outflanked. The enemy was trying to grasp the whole position between a pair of mighty jaws, and if they could be brought to meet, all was over. Already small detachments were advancing on the line of the retreat. They were under fire now from the right rear . . . and now . . . Zillner cast a glance once more towards the weakest point—now the Collaltos were retiring at the double. The men poured down like a grey avalanche, racing without any semblance of order, towards the nearest dip in the ground.

'Cease fire!' Zillner hissed out the words between his teeth, and gave the order to retire. The men crept out reluctantly from their cover. Pistol in hand, he hurried over to a group of Spicka's men, who were standing hesitatingly on the slope, Spicka himself among them.

'Do you want to be taken prisoner? Back, or I shoot you down myself.' The Czech pulled himself together at this, and staggered out at the head of his men into the open, where clouds of dust were rising from the ground, tiny flickers as of smoke, that came and vanished, wherever the swift leaden drops fell to earth. They hurried on. Only a few paces out from cover, and Zillner saw a figure at his side suddenly check. It was the pale-faced Doctor Freischaff. He flung up his arms, made one spring, and fell forward stiff as a log. Shot through the heart.

Pfustermeyer was there, on the left, his burly form moving with big, powerful strides, and beside him was the Major, pointing with his riding whip towards the burning village. Hallada had remained behind in the trenches, with an insignificant little hole in his ever worried head. He had died without even finding time for a last protest. Grill, the model captain, held a smoking Browning in his hand; he had shot down a couple of his own men, who had refused to face the rush across the open. The rest of the company followed at his heels, like cowed beasts after their master.

Once down in the hollow, however, where the well-timed shrapnel and heavier shells fell thick among the retreating men, even the impeccable Grill broke into a run. They were all running now, stumbling breathlessly on towards the village. There was no longer any semblance of order, only little irregular groups pressing on in a race for life, each man with lungs and limbs urged to the utmost. Even then it was all a matter of chance, for the little white clouds broke as often as not over the foremost, and the shells sent up their dreadful fountain-spurts of dust with an impartial mixture of old limbs and young, the active and the exhausted, mingled in one purplish carnage. On, on . . . in retreat! . . .

Over the torn and bloodstained ground of the Podolian steppe rose a wail from the depths of human hearts—Mother! That sacred name, the earliest word uttered in conscious speech—that word it was that rose now from the earth in shriek and groan, the last word uttered by parched lips to the unpitying sky. Mother! . . . The last heartfelt prayer, that could have no fulfilment on earth, or perhaps the wonderful vision mercifully granted to the dying ere they passed into nothingness. . . . The touch of tender, cooling hands on burning forehead and on thirsting lips: Mother! . . .

. . . .

'Company Four this way.' From a little birch copse, where the shadows were already lengthening towards evening, Zillner called again and again, assembling his men. But only some thirty of them straggled up, pale, half-dead, and grey with dust and fear and exhaustion. The Czech was there, with twelve of his men, von Prager had but five of his; the rest belonged, some to Andrei's command, and others to that of Freischaff, who had fallen. Andrei himself was missing.

'Where is Lieutenant Andrei? Has any one seen him fall?'

No one knew what had become of him. Some one had last seen him on the extreme left of the line—possibly he was now with the rest of the first company. Zillner passed his hand over his aching eyes. If only the boy might be spared! He had grown fond of him.

Shrapnel began to burst above the copse, as if it had scented out its prey. 'Retire!' And again they hurried back, keeping some sort of order until they reached the high road leading to the Austrian frontier. The men were worn out now with fatigue, and followed lethargically at their leader's heels. Along the road, the debris of the splendid regiments was hurrying westward—remains of the Collaltos, with those that were left of the Buttlers and the Landwehr, all mingled together. The disorderly flight had ceased now, and soon the officers had pieced the scattered units together, and were leading their men in orderly ranks. There were eight companies of the Tiefenbachers, and these had formed, under the hoarse command of the Major, into a column—the old man himself hobbling along on foot; his spare horse, his orderly, and the bugler had disappeared. The Adjutant had been left wounded on the field, and might by now be under the care of the Russian ambulance men. The whole of the third battalion was missing. So, as the stars came out, this wreck of a regiment dragged itself along. The men spoke no word. They passed a little hamlet through which they had marched singing merrily but three days back; the market square was packed with supply and transport waggons wedged inextricably into one wheeled chaos.

'What are you doing here?' asked the Major angrily of a captain apparently in charge. 'You should have been on ahead long since. Can't you see we are retiring?'

'We have been waiting for orders since one o'clock this afternoon. We had no instructions to move anywhere.'

'You have had no instructions from division headquarters?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, then, you can act on mine. Back to Jaroslav at once.'

'Very good, sir.'

But while the tangled confusion of vehicles was slowly getting under way, something new and terrible happened. Sudden flashes of light appeared far away on the horizon; the night was lit with bursts of red that flung whirring bullets down upon the train of carts where men were cursing and cracking their whips. Fierce flames shot up almost at once from the houses round, there was a jangle of bells in the church tower, and from a building on the north side, which had been temporarily transformed into a field hospital, came wild, bestial screams. Hurrying flames slithered along the roof. The transport animals were mad with fear. The peasants, who had been commandeered with their teams, cut the traces and galloped off; revolvers cracked out, and heavy wheels cut ugly ruts through the groups of men and horses. Shouts of 'Every man for himself' rose above the din. At doors and windows, terrified Jews stretched vain arms out towards the approaching terror. The remainder of a Hungarian regiment dashed out with wild shouts in the direction of the unseen enemy, making for the eastern side of the village, and pouring out a hail of lead into the darkness. It was a vain endeavour; the guns were far off, and had got the range most accurately. The cries from the hospital building had ceased; the roof had fallen in, with a rain of sparks, and yellow tongues of flame were licking greedily out from the windows. The Tiefenbachers did not wait for more, but hurried off as the first shells crashed down upon the square. They struggled on for a couple of hours, and then, reaching a village, flung themselves down to rest.

'Gentlemen,' said the Major, in a voice that was but the weary shadow of his ordinary tone. 'Let the men have one emergency ration, if you please. One, you understand me. For Heaven's sake, see that they don't break open the others.' The men ate their tinned meat cold; for two days they had eaten nothing but dry bread. They found such quarters as they could in cottages and barns. Zillner dropped exhausted on to some evil-smelling straw in a cow-byre, and fell into a leaden sleep.

. . . .

The Russians did not follow up the pursuit, and next morning the retreating masses of men were gradually restored to order as far as could be done. Already the leaders were preparing to resume concerted operations. The long-lost third battalion of the Tiefenbachers came in at last, having followed a line almost parallel with the high road, and losing its leader on the way, smashed to pieces by a shell. The glittering grey line had shrunk to a third of its length. By good fortune, the field kitchens were at hand, and the cooking pots boiled gaily as ever.

Major Blagorski had still no mount of his own, but had taken over one belonging to Hallada, who had no longer any use for it.

The Brigadier sat in a car lately the property of the General of Division, now deceased. His spectacles twinkled uneasily as he glanced down the column, noting the number and state of the men. He was feeling far from comfortable. The unlooked-for disaster of the day before had sent him flying terror-stricken, with his staff, far ahead of the general retirement, and it was not until this moment that he had learned of the destruction of the supply column. The entire transport of the division—waggons, stores, and ammunition—had been annihilated, and most of the telephone and telegraph material was lost. Three waggons, under the charge of a subaltern of engineers, had got away, and that was all. Certainly, it was not a pleasant situation for a Brigadier. There was considerable likelihood of some disapprobation in high quarters, and how was he to explain away the fatal error of leaving the entire transport without orders in case of emergency? He cast about for some one upon whom to lay the blame.

'How comes it that the supply column had no orders to retire?' he asked sternly, turning his spectacles full on the young captain of the General Staff, who sat at his side. But the other was wary, and guessed what was in his mind.

'I only heard of it this morning, sir. Possibly Colonel von Rutzinger, in the excitement of the moment, may have omitted to send word. Naturally it did not occur to me to consider even the possibility of such an omission.'

'H'm—yes. H'm.' This left matters as bad as ever for the Brigadier. He felt helplessly that the other was meanly sheltering himself behind the shadow of the dead Colonel, whose evidence was no longer procurable. 'H'm. Yes, no doubt. But afterwards—surely it must have occurred to you later on to ascertain what *had* been done. A point of so vital importance . . . Colonel von Rutzinger having fallen, you would automatically take his place.'

The young man faced the spectacled scrutiny with an air of untroubled innocence. 'By that time, sir, we were at a point where it would have been impossible to ascertain what instructions had been given.'

'H'm. . . .' The Brigadier knit his brows, and was silent for a moment. Then he went on, speaking with injured emphasis, 'It was unpardonable—altogether unpardonable of the Chief of Staff to have forgotten it. But in any case, the responsibility cannot be laid to my charge.'

The Captain murmured a respectful assent.

All that remained of the Chief of Staff was a naked corpse in the trenches far behind. The Cossacks had plundered and stripped the body, and left it to the crows, that had formed up with greedy eyes to the funeral parade. And those who mourned for him folded their hands—the responsibility could not be laid to his charge.

. . . .

Those were the days when the Russian giant was thrusting clumsily groping hands far into the Austrian territory, driving in a wedge of men such as the world had never seen. They poured in continually from the east, making towards the capital,[1] in numbers that upset all calculations upon which the defence had been based.

'This is altogether unprecedented; unlooked for,' complained the General in Command. 'They 're not giving us a fair chance. And from all information received—no, it is impossible. And what are they doing in the Ukraine? They were to have risen in revolt at the start. But there 's not a sign of any revolt. A most unsatisfactory state of things all round.'

The General himself, without any particular qualification for his task beyond the influence in high quarters which had secured his appointment, felt himself aggrieved. Elsewhere, the Austrian forces were pushing victoriously on into the enemy's country, while he himself was forced to act continually on the defensive. What could one do in a case like this? And casting about for some formula to aid his strategic mind, he hit upon the enticing phrase, 'Ride them down!' And he grasped it, making it a crutch for his support. That was the way, of course; the very thing. Up in the north [2] his colleagues were winning battles one after another, while he was expected to sit here and hold the position—nothing more. It was a minor part, with little chance of gaining any credit at the end. Hang it all, what the others could do, he must be able to do as well. The Russians were probably not so strong after all—those last reports from his airmen must be wrong. Had not the Intelligence Department, always a model of organisation and method, assured him that the mobilisation in the inner provinces of Russia was 'still far from complete enough to render the army capable of taking the field, as the lack of adequate railway communication and transport facilities rendered it a matter of no inconsiderable difficulty to effect the concentration of large bodies of troops.' This reassuring statement was, moreover, 'confirmed by intelligence received through confidential sources.'

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[1] The author is purposely vague as to which of the Austrian armies is concerned in the events described. The situation here does not strictly fit any section of the forces as actually placed, but he seems to be thinking of the Third Army under General Bruderman, though his force, in reality, never crossed the Polish frontier.

[2] The First Army under General Dankl, and the Fourth under General von Auffenbach.

What could be more trustworthy than this—from such a quarter? The General felt strongly inclined to regard the information brought in by his own airmen as exaggerated. Airmen were excitable by temperament—they saw a great deal more than there was to see. No, far better trust to the excellent authority of the higher official source. The elegant phrasing, too, was in itself calculated to inspire confidence. 'No inconsiderable difficulty . . . lack of adequate communication. . . .' No breathless excitement there. He would chance it.

The Chief of Staff intimated, with a discreet smile and a respectful murmur, that he too was disposed to 'chance it' . . . and the General proceeded to act. The army entrusted to his care was ordered out from its position to advance against the enemy. The carefully prepared defences, trenches and barbed wire entanglements, shrapnel-proof shelters for machine-guns, and laboriously constructed artillery positions—all these had formed a barrier wall against which, according to the plan first conceived by the Minister of War, the Russians were to batter their foreheads until the armies operating in the north could move down and roll them up from the flank, when they would be driven back and crushed against the rocky sides of the Carpathians. These defences were now abandoned, and the troops moved out to encounter the enemy in the open.

The advance proceeded rapidly enough. A small force of light cavalry went on ahead. The giant hand opened wide, while hundreds of thousands of men hurried forward into its grip. . . . And then, it closed. The General was very distressed to find himself surrounded.

It would be necessary to retreat, and that with speed! He allowed the fact to be communicated to the men of his courageous army, now fighting desperately and dying like heroes, whereupon he himself lost no more time, but motored off, driving with long stages and the briefest halts. Behind him, the army was hacking its way back, step by step, bleeding and tortured, scattered, and striving to reunite. But the giant hand grasped first at the capital,[1] and then turned to the northward, where the hitherto victorious armies were likewise forced to halt, being threatened from flank and rear. They halted, and commenced to retreat. Official telegrams flooded the country with lying accounts of how it had become necessary 'for strategical reasons' to abandon the capital, and reconstruct the front. And the brightness of confidence began to be obscured by a veil of doubt. Never since Radetzky's day had Austria been so hopeful and so united as at the outbreak of the war. But now the pessimists and the critics began to lift their heads. 'Aha! Abandon . . . reconstruct. . . . We 're beaten, that 's what it means. Beaten already, well, what did I say . . . ?' And so the germ of doubt and suspicion was spread abroad.

. . . Vienna was invaded by a locust-swarm of fugitives, hungering for compassion, each bringing one little story of private horror, which was told and retold continually—so many little black flags of poverty, confusion, fear, and the need of comfort, until the sun of confidence was darkened by their number. The official telegrams shouted to the people to keep cool. 'Listen to me, to me, only to me! I alone am privileged to know the truth—observe the guarantee of the *kaiserl. und königl.* censor; it is all here in black and white. There is no deception. The reconstruction was affected solely in order that we might await the enemy in a new and far superior position, an impregnable position,[1] and ensure his final and complete destruction.'

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[1] This would be Lemberg, the capital of Galicia.

[2] Crodek, the strong position west of Lemberg.

'All right,' croaked the pessimists. And the Press shouted Bravo!—for behind the Press was the Bourse, anxious, terror-stricken, with quavering pulse and trembling knees. 'Bravo! Yes, the army has retired before the weight of superior numbers, but we have still faith in the brave hearts of the men and the genius of their leaders. We are not downhearted—not a bit of it. No!'

Whereafter the Bourse took refuge in the phrases of the newspaper leaders, and found new courage—of a sort. But the troops? The men in the ranks, the unknown heroes, streaming back in broken columns along every road? They had marched bravely forward along the road of sacrifice; numbers beyond counting had flung themselves joyously into certain death, without a thought of self. These armies were as battering rams, forged from the very hearts of the people, a braver weapon than Austria in its best days had ever known. And now the best of them lay dead in the sand, or were driven in weary lines to captivity—a loss that nothing could replace. These men had no share in the agony of conscience that was ever in the minds of their leaders. Regiments and battalions struggled back along the road of pain, but they could yet hold their heads high, and look their fellows in the face. They bore the honourable marks of sacrifice, these beaten men; the halo of unnoted martyrdom shone over these poor draggled figures, and brighter still it gleamed above the common graves. There were regiments who had charged eight times in a single day. There were some that had lost nine-tenths of their officers, and two-thirds of their men in those terrible months of August and September—regiments brought down to the strength of battalions, and struggling on hopelessly, the gleam of courage faded from their eyes, the spirit crushed within. . . . Yet wherever on that *via dolorosa*, with its landmarks of pain, the broken men were called upon for yet another sacrifice, they answered to the call, facing about and holding on to the last man to cover the retreat of the rest. With lifted heads, and hands grasping with new strength at their rifles, these worn and filthy men, the peasants and the workers in the cities, went calmly and without complaint to do their duty. Such were the men, the rank and file.

On the third day, the black-and-yellow post that marked the frontier appeared once more upon the road, reaching out appealingly to the troops as they passed by. Even the double eagle on the shield above seemed stretching its neck towards them, as if begging not to be left behind.

Feldkirch's division passed on in a great silence; men thought with a shudder of the horrors in which their comrades lay buried. There were too many gaps in their ranks, and the companies had been reformed. Stragglers came in from time to time, and, counting these, the strength of the companies was once more brought up to something like a hundred men. More than half were missing. But the column, shrunken as it was, had regained a certain order; the precious artillery rattled along, carefully surrounded by infantry. Major Blagorski had found his horse, and had resumed his old anxious respect for the injunctions of his superiors: 'Keep your men strictly in order, gentlemen, if you please. The new commanding officer will soon be here.'

Save for the shrinkage in numbers, there was little in the appearance of the retreating army to show the horrors of the last few days. Thanks to the constant exertions of the officers in encouraging their men, the panic now was gone. The frightened mob, like a wild beast, had been on the point of bursting out from the cage of discipline, but they had forced it back again, though at imminent risk to themselves, for terrified men are not easy to handle at any time. The officers had throughout been foremost in the advance and last in retreat, the subalterns in particular, whose task it was to lead in that dance of death. Zillner, riding behind what was left of his company, thought of one whose widow would shed bitter tears over a letter that he carried in his breast-pocket. The other three were still alive. Young Andrei had come in the day before, with Pfustermeyer's company; unharmed, but with the furrow between his brows deeper than ever. 'We 'll beat them yet, sir, never fear.'

The Czech marched with his eyes fixed on the ground. A strange fellow. There was nothing to say against him in any way; he kept his men in order, and, though not exactly a hero in action, he had certainly not behaved badly. He carried out his duties resignedly, as one unfairly set in a dangerous post, which he defended without enthusiasm. He was not of those who gladly shed their last drop of blood in the common cause. He was a son of that divided race that had grown fat on German culture, and yet thirsted for the doubtful well-springs wherewith great mother Russia watered the endless wastes of Panslavism.

Prager, the third, was the same as ever. Cool and indolent, always with a cigarette between his lips. Brave, because his honour as a member of his student corps demanded courage, not from any kind of military ambition. His men, the tactical situation, the progress of the war itself—all these were things that did not concern him in the least. He would march cheerfully at the head of his men, and exposed himself when necessary, but he exerted no influence among the rest; only kept to himself, and smoked his cigarettes.

Zillner was happy to have his three subordinates still with him. The experiences of those last few days were of a sort to create attachment between the men who had lived through them. He rode now, as did his brother captains, deep in thought, resigning himself to a feeling of melancholy, as at a funeral, where the longing for a resurrection makes itself felt behind the thought of death. They were still young, and the good bright light of the sun was cheering; the dreadful things of life are soon forgotten after all. They were still alive, and could not help beginning to hope once more. Hesitatingly at first, then with increasing strength, the men began to throw off the fear that had haunted them till now.

It was otherwise with the General Staff. The man who but a few days back had pointed forward with the imperative gesture of a new Napoleon, was suffering now the agonies of a reproachful conscience; orders and instructions were sent out unceasingly, and precautions taken for every conceivable emergency. Outposts were set continually to guard against any surprise from the heavily advancing Russians, so that the men were despoiled of their night's rest. The higher command exhibited every symptom of nervous anxiety, racing on swift cars far ahead of the main body, pulling up here and there to improvise some temporary headquarters on the way, and issuing detailed orders thence to the various units as to what should be done in the event of this or that, all precisely as on manœuvres. One point, however, was insisted upon with an earnestness that told of something more: the troops were to entrench themselves without fail every night before going to rest. And so the road-wearied men dug trenches every night, only to march on next morning leaving their work behind them unproved. The enemy never attacked these positions, but contented himself with engaging the rearguard on the march, preferably about noon, the action then lasting until evening. The men sacrificed themselves bravely, and the retreat went on.

From a practical point of view, everything was most carefully provided for. Other arrangements, however, left much to be desired. The men were poorly fed; meat was obtainable, but there was no bread to be had. The men had not tasted bread for seven days, and the villages they passed through had already been ransacked for everything eatable. The supply officers shrugged their shoulders; the field bakeries had been captured with the transport, their stores likewise. *Force majeure* . . . *Dies iræ*. . . . The army was growing desperate with exhaustion. Any man who fell out was certain of being finished off by the Cossacks that prowled round flanks and rear like jackals, alternately craven and bold. Their own cavalry struggled along on worn and starving horses; the petted animals, all unused to the hardships of the field, could not hold out without proper quarters and regular feeding, and died off now like flies; the roads were hedged on either side by the swollen bodies of dead beasts, and the dismounted Centaurs followed ignominiously on foot at the tail of the columns. The population of the villages and hamlets preserved a humble silence; it was the will of God. In the Polish quarters the women shrieked aloud at sight of the troops in retreat, dreading plunder and worse to come. The miserable Ruthenians stood with deferential smiles as long as they were observed, and grinned maliciously as soon as one's back was turned. And the priest was always to be seen in an attitude of humility before his church, with his hands folded over his portly stomach.

On the fifth day of the retreat, an unpleasant episode occurred. Grill had been detached with his company on flank guard, and halted his men at midday in a Ruthenian village. The men were sent to fetch water from a well in the courtyard of the Bürgermeister, as being presumably the best in the place. The peasant stood obligingly with a row of buckets ready filled. This unusual courtesy on the part of a Ruthenian struck Grill as curious, and a sudden suspicion crossed his mind. 'Wait,' he cried, 'let the fellow drink himself.' The man turned pale, and glanced uneasily round. 'Drink, you dog!' roared Grill. Desperately the peasant turned, and would have fled, but it was too late. 'Hold him—so. And now pour the stuff down his throat.' Five men held him, bound his hands, and tried to force the rim of a cup between his teeth; the man struggled and spat.

The water was saturated with arsenic. Grill set a cordon of men to surround the house, and went through the rooms. A woman, an old man of seventy, and three little girls were dragged out.

'Tie them together, and set them against the wall.'

A volley was fired; the troops set the village on fire and marched off.

That evening Grill told the story to the others. Zillner looked at him, and asked casually: 'The woman and the children—you shot them too?'

'Of course. Stamp out the whole brood—the only thing to do.'

That was Grill's way.

. . . .

They came to the great river,[1] on the banks of which the students of the art of war had fought out their fiercest discussions over the *Kriegsspiel* in the days of peace. The army crossed unopposed. Next day the giant hand came groping across, only to close on the empty air. Then it was withdrawn and groped its way towards the fortress in the south.[2]

But the Austrian armies hurried on, and did not pause until they had penetrated far into the western tracts of their own country. The north, east, and south were occupied by the enemy.

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[1] The river San.

[2] Przemysl.

CHAPTER VI

Grand old regiments, and glorious. . . . Summer was nearing its close, and war strode breathing mightily through the land. To the north, the power of the German war machine, handled by men of genius, had checked the heavy-witted masses of the advancing Russians, and flung them back across the frontier; to the west, again, the persistent violence of the German onslaught had demolished fortresses, conquered a country, and was now pushing on stubbornly, undiminished, through the territories of an ancient foe. Meanwhile, in the south, Austrian courage, under incapable leaders, was being drained of its blood in the struggle against the heroic defence of a misguided people. It was here that Martens' Brigade, the Haugwitz Dragoons and the Uhlans, made their last charge; a death-ride never to be forgotten.

On a level plain, six thousand paces across, a mighty line of Russian guns thundered out upon our infantry. Martens' Brigade, untouched as yet, was posted in a little hollow on the left flank, with the regiments drawn up in line. Fifteen hundred horsemen, still more or less decently mounted; a whinnying, stamping, shaking of heads, and whisking of tails all down the long front. Flies and hornets, intoxicated with the sun, hung in bloodthirsty swarms about the glistening bodies of the horses, fastening themselves on flank and shoulder, belly and neck, sucking and stinging mercilessly. The tortured animals flung up their heels, and flicked their cropped tails, but all in vain.

Krottenburg slapped with his gauntlet at the delicate neck of his restless thoroughbred. 'Got you, that time, you beast! Look at him: big as a grasshopper. Ugh!'

He held out the crushed body of a huge wasp towards his companion. ‘Seem to thrive, don’t they, even in this filthy hole?’

‘That’s just it,’ said Pelzl, the heavyweight captain of his troop. ‘Bugs and fleas and lice and Jews—just the sort of things that would thrive in a place like this. Increase and multiply—tropical luxuriance—the old story. And the finer senses gradually disappear. No such thing as a bath—and as for manicure . . .’

‘Bath—no, you’re right there,’ sighed Krottenburg. ‘Even the women don’t wash. I never saw such a lot; they are simply not fit to be touched. Here and there in the big country houses perhaps, you may find one or two of them passably clean—but *they’re* bagged by the General Staff. . . . Heigho, it’s a rotten life.’

‘Women again!’ said Pelzl, glancing at the dejected face of his handsome subaltern. ‘What an ungrateful beggar you are! With a charming wife of your own . . .’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Krottenburg, patting the neck of his chestnut caressingly. ‘Lisl—she writes every day, pages full of what d’ you call it, anxious, you know, and tender, and all that. I didn’t mean that. But, hang it all, a man can’t help it; animal craving, fair sex, and that sort of thing. You know what I mean.’

‘Gallant youth! Ought to be ashamed of yourself. Hullo, look! What are their High-and-Mightinesses over there palavering about now, I wonder.’ Pelzl looked across at the rising ground, where the Divisional Staff was drawn up, with glasses pointing towards the horizon. ‘Something brewing. Wonder if it’s for us? It’s an infantry business really; we’ve nothing to do anyhow but sit tight and look on till it’s settled one way or another. They might have let us dismount and unsaddle, too, instead of keeping us here over an hour on parade, and tiring out the horses. Oh, they’re a nice . . .’

The criticism was interrupted by the voice of the Brigadier, cutting in sharply over the heads of the restless horses, ‘Commanding officers, if you please.’

'Off to his Excellency,' murmured Krottenburg. 'Going to dismount us, I suppose, and set us pot-shotting with the infantry. Of all the dismal games. . . . Might as well be road-mending. Ugh!'

'It 's hardly likely. There are no enemy infantry for miles on this flank. Wait and see.'

Colonel Count Schartenhayn-Binswangen's splendid bay pranced lightly down the front of the regiment. The Colonel, white-haired, yet lithe of figure as any subaltern, rode with long stirrups, and an easy, careless seat, yet with that inimitably graceful elegance in the saddle which distinguishes the Austrian cavalry officer from all other horsemen in the world. He had been a prominent figure on the turf.

He galloped off now towards the group on the hill, the three staff officers following.

The hawk-nosed General of Division turned, and pointed towards the enemy artillery on the farther side of the plain, as if marking down his prey.

'There, Colonel, if you please. That line of guns.'

'Yes, your Excellency?' The Brigadier stared uncomprehendingly at his superior officer.

'We are facing the right flank of the position. Your brigade will attack there, if you please.'

The old soldier sat up stiffly. 'Your Excellency will permit me: our patrols report that the batteries are well under cover, and their front protected with barbed wire defences. There is also a battalion of infantry on their right, in support of the guns.'

The General's sallow cheek flushed a dull red. 'And what then, sir? My order was surely clear enough.'

The strong, worn face of the Brigadier turned a shade darker. 'I thought it my duty, your Excellency, to point out, with all respect, that the order could hardly be carried out successfully.'

'What—what do you mean? Not be carried out. We shall see. Now, sir, once more. Your two regiments will advance instantly to the attack. Instantly. You understand me?'

'Yes, your Excellency, I understand.'

'Captain von Sagberg of my staff will lead the attack. He has reconnoitred the ground.'

The young staff officer bit his lip. 'Very good, your Excellency.'

Once more the Brigadier raised his hand to the salute. 'Your Excellency, I would respectfully request that the order be given me in writing.'

'And why, sir?' The General's scraggy neck seemed straining at his gold-embroidered collar, as he thrust out his yellow bird-like face towards the other.

'That it may be found upon my person afterwards, in proof that *I* was not responsible for the destruction of the brigade.'

'Sir. . . .'

The two looked hard into each other's eyes; those of the one aflame with fury, the other's steady as lances of steel. At last the vulture face drew back slowly: his Excellency turned to his Chief of Staff, his voice tremulous with the struggle for self-control. 'Make out the order in writing, Major, if you please.' The order was written, and he scrawled his name at the foot. 'There, sir. And now, I presume I may request you to attack as I have said.'

'*Zu Befehl, Excellenz.*'

Four men rode smilingly back to the brigade; four men released from human hope, no longer bound by the most human thought of all, the thought of life. Four soldiers, hurrying back to their regiments, to do their duty. Life they knew was far behind them now; before them, nothing but an honourable death. And so they smiled.

The Colonel of dragoons reined up facing his men, and rose in his stirrups. 'Men!' The voice of the white-haired old aristocrat rang out like the call of a silver trumpet to man and horse. 'We are advancing to the attack. And you will show that you are, by God's grace, of that same good fighting stock as your fathers, who fought at Malplaquet and Kollin, at Aspern and

Strzezetitz. On, then, dragoons, God with us!' The sabre flashed out like blue flame toward the sky. 'Trot!'

The squadrons emerged from the gully, their accoutrements ringing and gleaming in the sun, and advanced, making toward the right flank of the line of guns, the Brigadier and the young staff officer leading. The flood of horsemen made a wonderful sight. Unreal, indeed, it seemed; a vision conjured up from the dim past, when the prowess of mounted ironsides or cavaliers decided the fate of battles. But to-day. . . .

'Gallop!' Krottenburg felt his chestnut straining at the bit, bounding with mighty strides over turf and sand, delighting in the rush of cool air on its flanks. The rider himself, looking out from under his grey-muffled helmet, saw all things vaguely through a rose-coloured veil. There was no thought in his mind of anything. Landmarks ahead came towards them, neared, passed, and vanished under the rushing hoofs; in front again were the leaders, swaying rhythmically in the saddle at each galloping stride. . . .

Krottenburg, like a good soldier, felt now but one thing: On, on, and cut them down! On! He pressed the heaving sides of his charger, well behind the girth, and surged forward drunk with the ecstasy of the horseman at his best. Thus his father had ridden, at Strzezetitz, against the men whose sons were now his comrades in arms. No thought, no question—only the instinct to press on—on, on, and cut them down!

Pelzl the heavyweight flung his arms wide, a gesture Krottenburg knew, and next moment his saddle was empty. But Krottenburg felt no pang at the sight of the motionless body, as the hurrying earth beneath the hoofs bore it towards him. The thoroughbred cleared the broad spread mass of flesh in a stride, and passed on. Ahead of them, the machine-guns had opened fire. The young staff officer slid backward to the ground, and a moment later the Brigadier too was down; both lay pinned under their horses with the hoofs jerking convulsively above them.

On, on . . . The Colonel's white hair still shone out through the clouds of dust. Bending down over the neck of his charger, and with sabre pointing forward towards the guns, he dashed on, the regiment at his heels, all wild with the fury of the race.

There they were—plainly visible now, the men at the guns, and there the guns themselves. Ready!

'On, men, on!' roared Krottenburg; 'we have them now. On, on, dragoons!' For the first time in his life his voice was unsteady, as the voice of a man delirious. 'Hurrah! dragoons, hurrah!'

But what was this?—things turning round, whirling, quicker and quicker . . . the guns quite close, but whirling over to the right, no, to the left, and rocking, rocking . . . What was happening? Now he himself falling, floating down softly to a great depth, softly, softly . . . Lisl, forgive, Lisl, Lisl . . .'

Through a heavy grey mist he saw that horses were rushing past him; horses with empty stirrups flying. And then no more.

. . . .

On a little eminence, comfortably out of range, sat he of the vulture face, with his aide, watching the attack. 'Wanted waking up a bit, that 's all. They 're getting along in fine style now.' What do you say, Major?'

The Chief of Staff made no answer, but vowed inwardly that when once this business was over, he would use all his influence to get transferred into an easier post—a comfortable chair in an office, at the Ministry. . . . If only they were well out of *this*. . . . Surely the war god still protected them? He would never let them all . . . all . . .

He glanced covertly at his Excellency, and the latter spoke again. 'There you are—you see? Quite close. They 'll cut those batteries to mincemeat in good cavalry style, just watch. . . .'

Then the guns spoke. The vulture face craned out from the gold-embroidered collar: 'Open out, open out—in a case like this—obviously, with an objective of that extent. . . . Tut, tut—really, gentlemen, to go on like that in close order—altogether impossible.'

But the staff preserved an icy silence. The Major rubbed his close-cropped bristly moustache with a trembling hand—rubbed it intently, continually. . . .

For the brigade had disappeared—evaporated. A few of the horses were still to be seen; little dark specks whirling about frantically in the distance; then they too vanished leaving no trace, as raindrops vanish in a thirsty soil. One or two of them made toward their own lines, dashing in riderless, and with their trappings torn to rags. One came straight up to where the General stood; on it came, growing bigger and bigger, rushing madly towards them. . . . The beast halted in the midst of the scattered group, and stood submissively as an orderly came up to lead it away. It was Colonel Schartenhayn's bay charger. And at sight of it the yellow vulture face grew sicklier still; the General swung his horse round, and bowed his sharp nose over its neck:

'My God, my God, why didn't they open out? In close order! . . . And this is the result. . . .'

No one spoke. The staff galloped back in silence, following the bowed figure of their general to the safety of the rear. Martens' Brigade had ceased to exist.

But the Lady Empress, in her Heaven, might have frowned that day, and spoken sternly: 'Truly, not for such as he of the vulture face did we found this our Order. For heroes; not for such as he. Who hath indeed rather merited the whipping post, the pillory, and thereafter to be banished from our realm.'

So she might have spoken, our good Empress-Mother, and with tears.

. . . .

It was late in the afternoon when Krottenburg came to himself. He was lying in the shelter of a small copse; a brook was murmuring near by. The trumpeter of his squadron was bending over him.

‘What—what ’s the matter with me, Niederbichler? And where ’s the squadron?’

‘Mustn’t talk, sir—beg pardon, I ’m sure. I mean, better not just now.’ The man, a tall, broad-shouldered butcher from Vienna, had a bloodstained bandage about his head. ‘We ’re all right for the present, sir, trust me.’

‘But where are the others? And what ’s happened to Ariosto?’ Krottenburg, his handsome face now deathly pale, strove to raise himself from the ground, but sank back with a muttered curse. His head was dizzy, and figures of light danced before his eyes. The trumpeter was settling something under his shoulders, it seemed. And it hurt when he tried to speak. ‘Am I wounded, Niederbichler?’

‘Nothing very much, sir, only a bit of a bullet in the chest. Nothing hurt inside, far as I can see. Best not to talk, sir, if I might make so free. It might bring on the bleeding again.’

Blood . . . Krottenburg looked down at his tunic; it was dyed a reddish brown. He put one hand to his chin, and felt a sticky crust extending up over his mouth.

‘Niederbichler—it ’ll soon be over, won’t it? Get along, man, and let me die.’ He leaned back again; there were red stars flickering before his eyes, thousands of little red stars. ‘My wife . . . tell her . . . Last thoughts . . .’

‘Oh, it ’s not as bad as that, sir,’ said the man, with a smile. ‘Bit of a scratch, that ’s all. Be in the saddle again within a month, I ’ll warrant. Only lie still a bit, sir, the bandage isn’t very safe.’

‘You ’ve bandaged me yourself? You ’re a good chap, Niederbichler. Thanks.’

He lifted one hand, but it seemed to hang like a leaden weight from the wrist.

‘Not a bit of it, sir. Don’t catch us Haugwitzers leaving our officers in the lurch—and a Viennese at that.’ The trumpeter twisted his neat brown moustache with a satisfied air.

'I can't remember—what it was. How did it happen—the whole thing?' Krottenburg stammered out the words in a broken whisper, every word cost him a twinge of pain. His voice seemed glued in his throat, and he could hardly draw sufficient breath to speak.

'It was a beastly job, sir, and that 's the truth.' Niederbichler shook his fist towards the horizon; the roar of the guns had altogether ceased. 'The swine! . . . They cut us up—cleared away the whole lot of us—with machine-guns and spreading shot—there isn't ten men come out of it alive. I was riding behind the Captain at first—then when he went down, I swung the old chestnut round and fell in behind you, sir. Then all of a sudden, there I was on the ground and half silly, as you might say. Looked around—after the squadron; they 'd gone on. Then you come down, sir, and then, one after another, falling in heaps. Whole squadron—just wiped out. Then I got up, thinking what to do—you lying stiff as a log a hundred paces on ahead. But I reckoned you might not be done for yet. I was quick on my feet, as you may guess, sir, but half way across, I felt my helmet bashed in, and a sort of hottish feeling running down the sides. Couldn't be much as long as it felt like that, I reckoned, and on I went, and got across to you all right. And, just as I thought, when I ripped up the tunic a bit, I could see it wasn't more than a bit of a scratch. So I stayed by.'

'Sure, it 's not . . . ?' Krottenburg questioned anxiously, with his eyes.

'Not a bit of it, sir. Lungs, that 's all. Heal up in no time. Well, after that we lay there, may be a couple of hours. There was a lot of the horses racing about at first, and one or two of the men, but then they dropped, and that was the end. They stopped shooting after a bit, and then I brought you along, sir, and here we are.'

'Thanks, Niederbichler. I shan't forget.'

'Now we 'll lie low a bit till it gets dark, and the Cossacks can't see us, and then we 'll try and find a village, or an ambulance or something.'

Krottenburg felt his cheeks burning, and there was a dull sickly feeling in his chest. Something hot welling up continually into his throat, that had to be swallowed down and kept burning up again. Great drops of sweat stood out on his forehead.

The sun went down, and blue shadows crept over the plain. ‘Better be getting on now, sir,’ whispered the trumpeter. ‘Gently, lean your weight on me all you can. That ’s it. Hold on there by the collar.’

‘I ’m not a lightweight,’ murmured Krottenburg, smiling weakly. ‘It ’s no good—better leave me where I am.’

‘Not a bit of it. We ’re getting on famously. You just hang on, sir, and I ’ll manage the rest.’

Krottenburg felt the strong arms passed under his knees, lifting him up; then the hot flood welled up again in his throat, he strove to keep it back, but in vain. It pumped forth now in heavy gulps, a gurgling, dark red froth of blood. The trumpeter laid his master gently down by the edge of the brook, dipped his handkerchief in the water, and laid it gently on the wounded man's forehead. Then taking his water bottle, he tried to force a little water through the other's teeth. ‘Don't swallow it, sir, only rinse and spit it out again. It ’s nasty cholera stuff the water here.’

Krottenburg murmured something confusedly, and his head fell back. The trumpeter stood up, shaking his sinewy fists at the distant horizon and swore aloud. Then gently he lifted the unconscious man, dragged him across to a patch of grass, and laid him down. ‘ ’Tis a heavy weight to lift,’ he gasped to himself, wiping the sweat from the face, all caked with dust and blood. There was rage in his heart against those who had brought his handsome lieutenant to this.

The moon had risen, flooding the place with a milky light, and, striking full on the pale face of the wounded man, he lay like a stricken Knight of the Holy Grail, the scion of a noble race, thoroughbred through many generations of proud blood. It showed in the long, sinewy limbs, in the lines of his clear-cut features. There was no striking originality in the face, no marked individuality, no deviation from the normal, such as a mixture of blood can produce, at times passing it on insistently through generations as if by witchcraft. An unmistakable touch of something calculating and shrewd about the eyes may be the heritage of one whose distant ancestor so far forgot his duty to the race as to choose the pretty daughter of a merchant prince for his bride. Or a trace of something Jewish about the nose and mouth may be engrafted on the stock by one who had been forced to an alliance that saved the threatened fortunes of his house. . . . Or even, perhaps, a gleam of something exotic, of a more passionate, more creative intelligence, may light the brow, a trait derived from the lapse of some ancestress who had listened to the pleadings of some princely adventurer, some poet, artist, singer—or perhaps even a man of letters.

There was no such blemish in the pale face that looked up unseeing to the moon above the copse. Krottenburg was handsome, as all his race had been for centuries. His features bore the stamp of ancient lineage carefully preserved, through a line of ancestors counting brave, noble and distinguished soldiers, and gracious, honourable ladies who had not learned to shrink from motherhood ; mothers who had never known unfeudal desires, who had given and maintained the beauty that had ever been the distinguishing mark of the Krottenburgs. And the common fate of the men of this fighting race seemed nearing its fulfilment here. It was rarely that a Krottenburg died in his bed, and a family conclave on the Day of Judgment would call them up from many distant lands. From Kuno, earliest of that ilk, who had fallen on the banks of the Marsch, while fighting under Rudolf of Habsburg's banner, to Freiherr Wolfgang von Krottenburg, father of the present Lieutenant, who had died in the saddle in Bosnia, there were few who had not died a violent death. In the Holy Land, and on most of the battlefields of Europe, from Naples to the Baltic, and from Waterloo to Moscov, lay the bones of Krottenburgs mouldering in the earth.

The last of the stock opened his eyes. 'Better now,' he whispered. 'Much better now. Think I could walk a little.'

'Never think of it, sir, Just lie quiet a bit, and I'll take you on again. There's a village just across there.'

There was a sound of footsteps approaching. The dragoon slipped noiselessly behind a tree, and stared out into the darkness. 'Good luck—it's an ambulance patrol. Hey, there, this way.'

But the Red Cross heroes had taken to their heels, evidently suspecting a Cossack trick. An hour later a stretcher party came up, making straight for the wood.

'Hey, hallo!' shouted the trumpeter.

The corporal in charge of the party flung his rifle to his shoulder, and hailed back: 'Who goes there?'

'Austrians, can't you hear.'

'The password?'

'How should I know? I'm from Vienna, anyhow, and here's my lieutenant wounded.'

'Right—stay where you are.' And the patrol—a detachment of the Kaiserjägers—came running up.

'Are you from the dressing station? Where is it?'

'We'll show you.' The Knight of the Holy Grail was laid on a stretcher, and they moved off through the moonlight to a village close by. Here the last scion of the Krottenburgs was put to bed, and soon had fallen into a restless sleep.

CHAPTER VII

'You have now, I trust, gained some idea as to the theory of the work which you have volunteered to undertake.' The Professor, a stout little man with pince-nez, glanced round the operating theatre, which was filled with an audience of ladies in fashionable attire. And an ironical smile played round his hard mouth as he went on: 'We have yet to see how you will take it in practice. I warn you, there is nothing in the least romantic about it. The work of a field hospital is filthy and nauseating; it calls for skilful hands that are not afraid of touching the most abominable horrors, and iron nerves—the olfactory nerves especially.'

'Oh, how nasty!' whispered a fair young lady to her neighbour. 'Really, he seems to take a delight in saying unpleasant things. No tact, no consideration—vulgar little man.'

Her companion, a brunette with an air of superlative refinement, shuddered affectedly in her thin blouse. 'Yes, indeed! I positively tremble to think of what he may say next. There are things which it is really too painful to hear.'

'And see—think of it, Trudi—horrible!'

The two women edged closer in to each other, staring at the florid, clumsy creature in his white overall, like young birds fascinated by a cat.

'And then the way he sniffs—Ugh, nasty little man!'

The Professor inhaled the scent of clean human bodies, cosmetics, and fine linen, as if analysing it, and then exhaled again somewhat noisily.

'You have come here to-day bringing with you all sorts of perfumes from your wardrobes and cupboards . . .'

'Cupboards—what an idea!' gasped the fair girl.

'In a word,—the air you are accustomed to breathe. The place here will get used to it, no doubt; you, on your part, will have to get used to the smell of blood and matter from suppurating sores—and blood and matter are very different from roses and lilies of the valley. They *stink*, my dear ladies, they stink abominably.'

There was an uneasy movement among the audience. Thirty hats seemed shivering at once, and there was a slight shuffling of feet. . . .

But the brutal frankness of the surgeon did not produce the same effect on all. A tight-laced baroness, with distinctly Jewish features, leaned forward from the third bench towards the dreadful person below, watching him with greedy eyes through her lorgnette. A terrible man! She would go through fire and water—there was nothing she would not do for such a man! Behind, a noble spinster, whose virtue had never been assailed by opportunity, whispered venomously: 'If I were a wounded man, I know what I could do.'

'What, what?' asked the over-slender Samaritan at her side, with little rat-like eyes opened wide.

'If I were a wounded man and saw *her* coming, I'd sham dead till she had gone.'

'If that would save you! I do believe she would look at a dead man with just the same. . . . It's perfectly disgusting.' The two old maids coughed in sympathy, and sat looking stiffly before them. In the meantime, two covered stretchers had been brought in.

'*Exempla trahunt*—that is to say, we learn by example. I have a couple of specimens for you to-day—two samples of human wreckage and misery, in no way connected with the doings of war. Close in a little, if you please; this way. You will now have an opportunity of showing what you have learnt. These two patients have to be washed and bandaged.' His voice took on a harsh, commanding tone. 'Come closer, if you please. And bring your hearts with you, not your smelling bottles.' And as the stream of fashionable costumes rustled towards him, he went on; 'Those of you who do not feel able to stand the sight and smell of ugly things, had better leave at once, and for good. It will save trouble for all concerned.'

'Really,' murmured the fair girl with a little stamp of her foot, 'if it weren't for what people would say, I would not stay a moment longer. The man is simply appallingly indecent.'

'It 's dreadful,' agreed her friend. 'But think of the war.' The two stepped down on to the floor, keeping well to the back. None of the others had left the room; all were standing waiting to see what was to come. A thin wave of perfume rose from the group of women standing in half circle round the surgeon; very faint it seemed beside the penetrating smell of ether and carbolic from the little table close by. The Professor made a sign, and one of the stretchers was brought forward, the trained nurses standing by with calm, hard features under their white hoods. The patient was a woman of about fifty, with a red and swollen face; her bloodshot eyes wandered restlessly over the unaccustomed scene.

'This woman,' began the Professor, 'is a drunkard.' His voice had grown suddenly gentle as His who said 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' 'A hopeless case. She cannot hear what we are saying—hearing almost gone. Take away the sheet, please.'

A nurse lifted the sheet, and drew up the woman's chemise. The emaciated body, with breasts hanging down like empty bags, was stiff with dirt. The yellow skin was crusted with it. On the right hip was a great boil, white at the edges, and with matter exuding.

'Look at this please. The patient had a fall some weeks ago, probably while under the influence of drink. The slight wound thus caused has become inflamed by dirt, and finally developed into this. Blood and matter, you perceive. The smell, as I have said, is unpleasant. But it is a favourite perfume of war.'

Already the women were almost overpowered by the foul stench that rose from this wretched human sample of disease combined with poverty and filth. They stood in silence before the horror they were called upon to view. A few held lace handkerchiefs to their noses; two had sat down on the front bench, trying hard not to faint.

'*C'est plus fort que moi!*' gasped out a countess, famed throughout Vienna as a leading light in the arrangement of charity bazaars. . . . 'We must help where we can—but this . . . No, I can't stand it.' She fled from the room, holding a tiny white handkerchief to her face. Ten of the others followed.

'The patient must first be washed. The bandaging afterwards.' The merciless taskmaster looked round among his pupils. 'Aha! thinning out already. Good, very good!'

Two nurses lifted the woman up on to a table covered with plate glass. Suddenly she screamed. 'Don't go hurting me now—no, no—not there . . . Put me down, ye devils—put me down, I say, ye filthy whores.'

'We 're not going to hurt you, poor soul!' said the surgeon, laying a hand gently on the thin, draggled hair. She ceased crying out, but stared wildly about her. He bent down and shouted in her ear, 'You 're going to be washed—washed and bandaged. That 's all.'

'Washed—a mercy! And what for?'

To make you well again.'

Ah, thank ye kindly, your honour, thank ye . . . wash . . . well, well, then . . . She shook her head, and murmured indistinctly.

The Professor looked round as if in search of something, and fixed upon the fair girl, who was standing at the back, sheltering behind the broad back of the Hebrew baroness.

'You, if you please, young lady.' The girl stepped forward hesitatingly. He had picked her out at the very first—the brute.

'Smartly, if you please. We have no time to waste. Put on an overall—here. Soap, sponge, and carbolic. Now begin.'

The girl slipped on the overall with a shudder, and took the soap and sponge. 'Where—where am I to . . .' she stammered.

'From the neck downwards, if you please.'

With an effort the novice fell to work, pressing the sponge with the tips of her fingers against the patient's breast. But as the lukewarm water found its way through the crusted dirt, the sick woman began cursing anew. 'Take it away—take it away, I say. Ah, can't ye leave a poor woman alone? Leave me alone, ye white-faced bitch—d' ye hear? I won't have it! Ah, get away, ye miserable whore, or I 'll tear ye to bits, I say.'

This was too much for the girl. She dropped soap and sponge, and, holding her hands to her burning cheeks, fled from the room. Her neighbour and seven other ladies followed.

'Very poor people often talk like that,' said the surgeon gently. 'The next lady, please? Come—who is ready?'

There was a rustle of indecision among the indignant few that still remained. The Jewish lady with the prominent bust seemed for a moment to be considering whether she might not after all overcome her disgust for the ghastly nakedness that lay exposed to the gaze of culture and refinement. But possibly she lacked the true enthusiasm of the Samaritan. For the soul in this abundant fleshly casket cried continually that it was for his sake—for the sake of that strong, commanding brute of a man—she would gladly have shown him that there was nothing she would not do at his bidding. Yet she could not bring herself to approach the table, where the sick woman lay, now staring apathetically around. No—better wait for the next. The other patient was a man—and that would at least be . . .

'Well?' The Professor was already on the point of dismissing the volunteer angels of mercy with a few ironical words, and an earnest request that they would not trouble to come again, when a pale young woman stepped forward. 'If you please, I should like to try.'

'Aha! Lisl Krottenburg—really very plucky of her,' whispered the noble spinster in the background.

'I do hope though . . . they say actually one gets . . . er—vermin, you know.'

Baroness Lisl stepped over to the table, and laid a hand reassuringly on the patient's forehead. 'Now lie still, there 's a dear. It won't hurt, you know, and it will do you good.' The woman's eyes wavered uneasily, and her face twitched, as if she were about to protest again, but she did not scream. She bore the touch of soap and sponge without complaint, and murmured, 'Ay, she does it gently with her soft hands.' At last she even smiled, and when Lisl carefully and tenderly commenced washing the sore, she did not shrink, but murmured again, 'Soft hands, soft hands, a blessed angel. . . .'

The sun peeped through the high windows, shedding a soft light over the sick woman's smiling face. 'Better now, isn't it ?' said Lisl.

'Ay, I dare say,' murmured the other faintly, 'had to be washed sometime, I dare say. . . .'

Meantime the lady with the embonpoint was busy with the other patient. This was a fitter, who had had the flesh torn from his back by a machine. He was in great pain, and the Jewess touched him with deft fingers. The Professor smiled. 'You have the right touch, ladies, I see.' Then turning to the others : 'Those who are able and willing to go on with this may come again to-morrow as usual. Those who are not, will be good enough to consider their course of instruction at an end.' He bowed curtly, and left the room. The ladies rustled out offendedly.

'Charming trio they will make,' sneered the noble spinster, 'the flower of Austrian nobility, the Old Testament, and peasant vulgarity of the new school. And then a stench from the slums . . . the language of the gutter. . . . No, thank you. I have had quite enough.'

'Quite enough indeed,' agreed her companion. And the would-be angels of mercy, as they stepped out into the sunlight, were all of the same opinion. Yet most of them came again next day nevertheless. *Que faire ?*

It was a part of one's social obligation in those days. And where one fell out, there were ten to take her place. As gnats about a lighthouse, these ladies of society fluttered about the famous surgeon, and the more brutally he behaved, the more they felt his fascination. There were, it is true, a few who honestly wished to be of use, and these the choleric little man singled out with unfailing insight from the rest. Afterwards, when the wreckage of war came in on a purple wave, they did good service—the noblest service, as only women can. The others did what they could; they might, at any rate, comfort the more romantically wounded with their womanly charms. They tripped through the hospital wards on the look-out for such casualties as did not offend the æsthetic senses; heroes with bandaged heads, or one arm in a sling, were what they mostly sought. And these they cured by laying on of hands. Cases attended with blood and matter were left to the surgeon, with his staff of selected assistants—the women who had taken up the work for its own sake, and whose lot it was to watch knives cutting into flesh, to hear the grate of the saw upon shattered bones, to breathe the stench of broken humanity, and feel the cries of helpless agony that turns men into beasts. The little Professor worked through it all, day and night, like a gentle apostle, and about him, like a halo, the white-clad circle of his helpers.

. . . .

The two who had satisfactorily endured the ordeal by soap and water came out together. 'Isn't he splendid?' exclaimed the Jewess excitedly. 'Did you ever see such a man? Unpolished—insolent—and yet, *Oh, mon Dieu, qu'il est ravissant!* One could work for hours under him, and never tire. There is something fascinating about him—like the lash of a whip decked with roses; like a vampire that sucks our blood before even we can give him leave. Don't you feel the same?'

Baroness Lisl frowned slightly. The morbid enthusiasm of the Jewess disgusted her. 'I can't say I do,' she replied. 'He is very rough in his manner, as you say, and he is extremely clever. But I can't say I ever found anything fascinating in the lash of a whip, or a vampire either—whatever that may be.'

'My dear Baroness, you don't suppose I meant it literally.' The Jewess gave a little satisfied laugh, and swayed her body sensuously from the hips. 'But he is a man one cannot get away from—at least, so I find.'

'I wish you joy of him, I'm sure. As far as I'm concerned, he can be as vulgar as he likes, if he 'll only send me to the front.'

'To—the—front! To the hospitals? My dear, for a lady in our position, it is quite impossible.

'If I go, it will be possible,' said Lisl with dignity.

'But consider. You do not know. There are women of all sorts out there—women, you know—well, quite outside all decent society. And then the accommodation—I am told they often have to sleep in the same room with the doctors. In the same room! And no comfort or conveniences of any sort. Unbearable! One frock, and a change of linen, and that is all. And what they have to go through . . . really, for one of us—impossible!'

'Anyhow, I am going. And the spider creature can say what he likes.'

'Spider? Who?'

'Vampire, then, or whatever you call him. I can't stay here like this any longer.'

'Poor dear—I understand. But even if you do, I'm afraid there's very little chance of your finding your husband. I mean, of course, I hope you won't find him at all, in that way. So what is the use of going off on such an escapade?'

Lisl did not answer. In her heart she felt that the other was right. It was a mad idea. How was she to find him in that endless chaos? Still—once at the front, no matter where, she would feel somehow nearer. And if—if he should be wounded, it would be easier to get to him. Her delicate eyebrows drew together in a resolute firmness. She must—she would. Outside the University the two women took leave of each other. The Jewess walked up the steps a little awkwardly—her voluminous bulk found steps a little trying.

'Our new hospital, you know. I am endowing two wards—sixty beds.'

Baroness Lisl watched the climbing figure with something of envy. How much easier life was for *her*! Casting her affection upon one man or another as the fancy took her, busied with charities, and eternally satisfied with the sense of her own importance, she had no single passion that absorbed her whole life and thought, and made all other things seem trifles. She had not to suffer every hour at the thought of what might happen to another. No lover whom it would be as death to lose. . . . Yet after all, was she not rather to be pitied for that very lack? How empty her life must be, with its futile dreams of some morbid ideal. She had no real friend, no one cared to help her if they could; she was a poor ridiculous creature, and dreadful to look at. Something she must have to keep her womanhood from withering to nothing—and so she drifted from one passion to another, from one self-imposed unnecessary task to the next. Always enthusiastic about something, and always appearing ridiculous in the eyes of others. 'Poor thing!' thought Lisl. After all, better to have given all one's heart to one, as she herself had done.

Where could he be now? Lisl fell to dreaming as she walked through the drowsy streets, down the Ringstrasse, where the dust hung like a grey frost on the sun-scorched planes. She walked through the park, where tired workers sat nodding on the seats—and all the while she was thinking: Where is he? It was a week since she had received his last card; only a few lines to say they had crossed the frontier. Moritzerl! She could see him now . . . could hear his kindly drawl . . . if only he were to come round the corner now, there by the rose-bushes—and she could run to meet him, as in the old days, no more than that—it would be far more wonderful now. To be held in his arms again . . . she flushed at the thought. Moritzerl! . . . Did he still care for her? 'Loves me, loves me not. . . .' With the impulse of a school-girl she bent down to look for a daisy in the grass at the edge of the path, but there was none. Did he think of her still? And suddenly she felt an overwhelming sense of loneliness; felt herself so forsaken and miserable that she could have crept in among the bushes to sit down and cry. Tears trickled down her cheeks, and slipped between her trembling lips. If any one were to see her! And perhaps, after all, he did not think about her so much now. Hastily she dabbed the tears away and glanced round; there was no one in sight. The clock in the Rathhaus tower struck one. Perhaps he did not think so much about her now . . . he could not, of course. He was riding about and killing people! Had Pelzl remembered his promise, she wondered, that evening at the Grabencafe, and kept her Moritz out of danger? Oh, Heaven, how dreadful it all was, dreadful, dreadful! If . . . if he should. . . . No, no, dear God, not that, anything but that. Better to die herself at once. With a sudden twitch she broke off a little sprig from a bush—a parched up little twig of lilac. No, it could not be. Not that. She loved him so—it could not come to that. Seven warlike centuries had seen many ladies of Krottenburg walking thus alone, and thinking the same thoughts. Yet many of them had been widowed young. But none had ever married again. For it was the way of those men to love their women and hold them fast, even beyond the grave.

. . . .

Baroness Lisl's pretty head was in a whirl as she took her way home. One thought clung round her like rich, dark-red roses: I love him. I love him. And one pierced her heart as with thorns: Does he still think of me? And one seemed reaching out from a great depth to grasp with clammy hands at her throat: if he should fall. . . .

Men and women passed her as she walked, and seemed to vanish in a mist. Many turned to look at her, but she did not see. With hard, strained eyes she fought her way through the thorny waste of her distress, no braver than any woman of the people. The war had compassed many women's hearts about with those same thorns of hope, fear, and despair, and each must fight her own way through, be she princess or woman of the slums,—unless she were of the fortunate few whose husbands were in the volunteer motor corps, or on the General Staff, or relegated to the lines of communication, when, of course, the way was easier.

At the back of the Grecian temple set apart for phrase-makers and political jugglers, where the people of Austria in times of peace allowed their foolish and unscrupulous representatives to mouth out proof of how incapable they were of governing themselves—behind this splendid edifice with its horse-breakers and quadrigæ and bald-headed Hellenic sages, stood a paper-boy, shouting out, 'Special extra! Great battle at Lemberg. Special.'

'Here, boy.' Lisl tore the sheet, still damp from the press, out of the boy's hand. Lemberg—his regiment was there. Once more the passers-by stopped to look; here was a woman, evidently a great lady, reading the news with a face so pale and drawn with pain as to attract attention in the mechanical hurry of the streets. There was little in the printed sheet to comfort a woman whose heart was swelling with dread—the usual official communication, with its customary lofty style, behind which the augurs of a later time learned to discern the more or less critical situation as it actually appeared. Now at the first, these official exercises in prose composition were received in good faith and implicitly believed, albeit they left the reader very little wiser as to the true state of things.

Lisl read: 'Our troops maintained their position generally. . . . The Twentieth Corps succeeded as a whole in making its way forward to the line Swynski-Potok. . . .' The evacuation of the capital, it appeared, was a strategical manœuvre involving no actual defeat, and should not be regarded as of any essential importance. 'Heavy fighting at Rawa Ruska, where, on the one hand . . . while on the other hand . . .' and so on. This last formula was an indispensable ingredient in the composition of the reports issued by the General Staff.

Lisl read on. All this was of little interest to her. He was not there. 'Heavy losses . . . ' And then at the bottom of the page: 'North of Lemberg, the work of reforming the lines was supported in a very essential degree by the cavalry . . . fearlessly brilliant charge . . . famous in history . . . undying laurels. . . .'

The hollow phrases danced before her eyes. The printed letters flowed together in a whirling grey mist; there was a rushing in her ears like the sound of the sea afar off. He . . . he was there. . . .

By good fortune a cab was passing; she hailed it, and stepped in. 'Heidelberggasse 4.'

The cool air on her face as she drove brought her to herself again; the rushing in her ears had ceased. But she felt her knees unsteady. 'I have grown dreadfully nervous,' she thought to herself. 'Think if I had fallen down in a faint.' If only she did not care for him so very very dearly! . . . Once safely back in her lonely house, she flung herself down on a sofa, feeling almost too weak to move. A cavalry charge near Lemberg . . . she would not think of it, she must do something . . . but the haunting spirit followed her as she moved through the rooms. More than her loneliness and desolation—fear, and an inexplicable horror seemed creeping out now from every corner.

An inquisitive sunbeam slipped through the half-drawn curtains on to the table where her husband's gold and silver cigar-cases lay; another played goldenly about the mounts of his riding-whips hanging on the wall. Baroness Lisl gave way, and broke into a storm of weeping.

. . . .

Early next morning, at nine o'clock, she faced the little Professor. He was frankly astonished.

'But you are very early, Baroness. We do not begin till eleven. Or was there anything you wanted to ask ?'

'I want to be sent to a field hospital with the Fifth Army, Professor. I must.'

The surgeon spread out his hands deprecatingly. 'Gently, gently, my dear Baroness. You are not looking well at all to-day. Like an Emmenthaler cheese—or rather, like Roquefort—that is to say, a sickly green. You had much better . . .'

'You are very flattering, Professor, I'm sure. But do please be serious for a moment. I promise to have cheeks as red as the reddest apple once I get there. And you can manage it if you try, I know. A word from you, and I shall be with my . . .' She broke off, blushing. 'And I shall be there. Dear Professor, you will help me, won't you ?' She smiled humbly down upon the little man ; he seemed to feel uncomfortable.

'Well, really, you know . . . if it had been the other one . . . she should have gone at once. She could stand it—she had plenty of—er, strength—to draw upon. But you. . . . Think what it means. Bad food, insufficient sleep, and uncongenial companions. . . . And, honestly, you do not look as if you could stand it.'

'Thank you,' put in Lisl hurriedly. 'You need not tell me any more what I look like. Roquefort, wasn't it ?'

'I'm not sure we ought not to say Gorgonzola. And that is worse. But seriously—I don't think you could stand it. Sleeping in badly ventilated rooms . . . or shifting about the country at a moment's notice . . . in a word . . .' He paused, and then went on earnestly: 'I shouldn't like to think of you in all that mess. The other one could stand it better. She's more—well, more robust, let us say.'

Lisl could not help laughing. 'You are not very kind to "the other one," as you call her. And she's madly in love with you, you know.'

'The devil!' The Professor was positively startled.

'Well, I can't help it if she is.' He shrugged his shoulders. Then looking sternly at Lisl, he went on: 'It is madness for you to think of going to the front. And I do not think it would be pleasant for you after all to find your husband there. Still, since you are evidently determined to worry me until you do go'—his hard mouth curved to a smile—'there is a hospital train leaving to-morrow, with a detachment of the Order of the Holy Grail. I might perhaps. . . .'—a well-spring of joy bubbled up in Lisl's heart—'I might perhaps write to Lieutenant Count Saarfeld, and ask him to take you along.'

'Mucki Saarfeld? But what has he to do with the hospital trains?'

'Oh, he is in charge. Permanently, I understand. His crusading ancestors would hardly have cared for such work at such a time, but—well, *tempora mutantur—et cetera*.'

'Mucki! Well, anyhow, that will be company.'

'Then you really intend to go?'

'Of course I do. And thank you, thank you so much, dear Professor.' Lisl pressed the little surgeon's hand warmly.

'You must come back soon, you know.' The eyes behind the glittering spectacles rested in a long glance on the slight figure. Lisl's cheeks had already gained a touch of colour. 'Come back soon, and don't bring your husband to me. He won't be a serious case, you know—a scratch on the little finger at the outside—and you won't need me for that. Good-bye.' He had spoken with such unaccustomed kindliness that Lisl looked at him in surprise. And suddenly, before he could prevent it, she pressed a little kiss on his ruddy forehead.

'That 's for the prescription, doctor,' she cried, with a little happy gleam of mischief in her eyes. It was the same little imp that had lurked there in the old days, when many men had lost their hearts to the gay little Countess Erwangen. To-day it was shy, it is true, and ready to take to flight again into the brown depths if the bat-winged spirit of fear should come again.

The Professor rubbed his forehead with a smile, and settled his glasses on his nose. 'I shall charge it on the bill, Baroness, as causing serious disturbance during consultation.'

. . . .

Baroness Lisl rang for her maid. 'I 'm going to the front, Marie.' The middle-aged woman, who had attended her with discreet correctness hitherto, permitted her features to express surprise.

'And which trunks will Frau Baronin wish to have packed ?'

'The little handbag, Marie, that is all.'

'But'—the maid opened her eyes wide—'the little handbag—it will not hold one dress.'

'I shall wear my grey walking dress. Pack a little linen—that is all I shall want.'

'But the travelling case—the toilet sets. . . .'

'Soap box and toothbrush, and my thick lace shoes.'

'And no more. Frau Baronin—surely . . .'

'Never mind ; do as I say, Marie. I am not going to stay at hotels, but as a hospital nurse, at the front.'

'*Du lieber Gott.*' . . . The woman looked aghast at her mistress. 'And I am not to go at all ?'

'You will stay and look after the house, Marie.'

'Oh, but how is it possible ? Who is to dress the Frau Baronin . . . to arrange the hair. . . . It will be terrible.'

But Marie protested in vain. The little handbag was packed, and nothing more. Baroness Lisl fastened the black and white cap of a nurse over the dark hair, and drove to the station, leaving her faithful helper in matters of less earnest import to weep alone.

. . . .

The fine brand-new hospital train of the Order of the Holy Grail stood ready for departure by the platform. A tall officer of Uhlans was marching up and down like a pendulum.

'How do you do, Graf Mucki. Here I am, if you please, with all my goods and chattels.'

The over tall and over slender young man seemed to double up as he bent over the hand of his old acquaintance. 'Delighted to see you, dear Baroness.' He glanced at the miniature travelling bag. 'That really all your luggage? Haha!' Then, with a certain nasal dignity of tone, as if receiving a deputation: 'It is indeed gratifying to see ladies from our own circle taking an active part in the noble task of healing the wounds inflicted by the war . . . their delicate touch will go far to assuage—ah, to assuage . . . ahem.'

'My dear Mucki, for Heaven's sake!—Where did you get all that newspaper nonsense? Is it part of your service equipment?'

The lanky one regarded her with serious eyes. 'You did not allow me to finish, Baroness. I speak officially, you understand. Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes—assuage—assuage the sufferings of our wounded heroes. May you ever find a true joy in the work which you have so nobly undertaken—and the Blessing of the All-Highest further your endeavours.—Rather neat, don't you think?'

'Very, I 'm sure. And do you often have to talk like that?'

'A good deal. I 've got up four little speeches: one for nurses, one for doctors, one for veteran clubs, and one for local committees. All different, of course. Only the finish the same: Blessing of the All-Highest. Makes an impression, you know, and people seem to like it.'

'They do,' assented Lisl, thinking with some apprehension of the long journey before her. Graf Mucki would, she foresaw, be intolerable. She decided to have a headache as soon as she conveniently could.

The overgrown Uhlan rattled on. 'What do you think of my train? Looks nice, doesn't it? Makes you almost want to be a patient. Like me to show you round?'

They walked through the great cars, that still smelt of varnish. The cots were arranged in tiers, one above the other. There was a transportable operating room, and a separate kitchen car. Everything was in the neatest order, a model of practical convenience, and shiningly new.

'Here are my quarters. The medicine man lives next door, down at the other end; a plebeian sort of chap, with a beard, and dirty cuffs. Nobody else on the train that counts, except you and myself. There are some nurses joining up at Krakau, but I believe they are hardly people one would care to know. Very *chic*, isn't it?'

'I must get rid of him soon,' thought Lisl to herself. They were seated in opposite corners as the train glided out of the station, moving easily on its soft springs. Graf Mucki sat up. 'Ah! And now we are alone, Baroness—what do you say to a cigarette?' He took out his gold case and offered it with an air.

Lisl shook her head. 'I feel my wretched headache coming on,' she said. 'But tell me, Graf Mucki, how is it that you are here so far from the front, among doctors and nurses? Why are you not with your regiment?'

The young man's prominent blue eyes seemed to contract a little.

'Oh, my health, you know. Couldn't stand it.'

'But you 're quite well, aren't you?'

'Well, no, not quite. Can't sit a horse—strained a sinew somewhere or other. So what could I do? They put me on to this, and here I am.'

Lisl was raging inwardly. Here was this creature travelling about in ease and comfort, far away from any front, while her husband was riding into battle. If only he could have been here instead! Why could not *he* have strained a sinew—'somewhere or other.' But in her heart she knew it was impossible. He would never have stayed behind. There had never been a Krottenburg who stayed behind with the baggage and the sick in time of war. Ill they might be, even at the point of death, but they had always been in the forefront of things, amid the clashing of arms, not in the rear among the women. She thought of that Eberhard Krottenburg of whom Moritz had told her one day. Before the battle of Lützen, he had lain in a burning fever. But when the attack commenced, he had bidden his men lift him to his saddle, and had ridden straight into the forest of lances like the manly, untiring soldier that he was. Not until after would he let them carry him to the rear, and he had died the next day. No—no Krottenburg could stay behind. She knew it, and the knowledge spread like a black veil over her hopes and dreams. But she could not help a shy, secret feeling of pride. One of those men was hers—her husband!

'And so you follow the war from a hospital train, Graf Mucki?'

'Yes, they must have some one, you know, to represent and all that. That's where we come in.'

'But couldn't the doctors do that just as well?'

'The doctors? My dear Baroness, how can you think of such a thing? Who cares for a doctor? He's no authority, no distinction, nothing to command respect. No, it is we who must look after that part of the work. Wait till we get these Red Cross Committees turning up at the stations; you shall see how I make them answer to the rein.'

But Lisl had had enough for the present. 'I'm afraid I must rest a little, Graf Mucki. My head's so bad, and it makes it worse if I talk too much.'

The overgrown one took the hint. 'Really frightfully sorry, Baroness. Should so have liked a little chat with you. Hope you'll feel better soon.'

He rose, doubled up as he touched her hand, and went out. In the doorway he turned. 'Like me to fetch the doctor along?'

'No, thanks very much. It'll pass off in a little if I just keep quiet.'

She stretched herself on the plush-covered seat and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come. As soon as she closed her eyes, the nameless fear, the paralysing terror of something about to happen came creeping out from every corner. In vain she tried again and again to persuade herself that nothing had happened as yet. She would, at any rate, see him again soon, unharmed, or at the worst with only a slight wound. But in spite of all, she could not master her fear. There was yet another possibility—one that she simply dared not face. She could bear up bravely enough at times under the thought of his being wounded, but that other thing was more than she could endure. And what use to bear up bravely, when the same dreadful thought always came at the end, and forced her to break down after all. If only he were with her once more! She settled herself in a corner by the window, and watched the dull flat landscape drawing past behind the hurrying telegraph poles. She fell to counting them—one, two, three, four . . . and then, her weariness aiding, at the hundred and thirteenth, she leaned back against the cushions and slept.

. . . .

At Oderberg she awoke, and went out into the corridor. The sidings were packed with cattle trucks, and soldiers looked out from the sliding doors. All the men were bandaged somewhere; chiefly arm, foot, or head. It was a convoy of wounded. Ladies and gentlemen with the Red Cross badge on their left arms hurried about between the waggons, handing up refreshments to the men—sandwiches, lemonade, sausages, chocolate, and cigarettes. The soldiers laughed and jested, all apparently in the best of spirits.

Baroness Lisl was agreeably surprised. These men had come from the front, and they could still laugh? They looked well enough, too. All those horrors which the Professor had described when talking to his pupils, where were they? Surely it could not be as bad as he had said. Perhaps he had invented every word of it to frighten them. And there stood Graf Mucki, looking like a staff officer of the Salvation Army, surrounded by a crowd of women and girls, all listening reverently to his 'little speech' No. 4—the one for the local committees. Lisl looked down the train as far as she could see, noting the smiling faces of the men as they munched and smoked. Suppose there were men of the Haugwitz Dragoons among them. But these were only infantry, men of the Jäger Corps, and the Landwehr, with the trappings of many different regiments. She left her carriage, and went down along the line beside the train of wounded. In the fifth truck she caught sight of a man in the familiar orange and blue. A wave of hot blood surged through her. His regiment! They had . . . Oh, Heavens, they had been there after all! The man had a bandage round his head, and his left hand was tied up. She called up to him: 'I beg your pardon: do you happen to know Lieutenant Baron Krottenburg?'

'Yes, miss, I know him right enough.'

'Is he wounded?'

'Can't say. I got knocked out at the start, and didn't see what happened to the rest.'

'Where was he, then?'

'Number Five squadron. On the left, they were, when we charged.'

Lisl felt as if she must faint, and controlled herself with an effort. Here, in front of all the soldiers—and she a Krottenburg! No! She grasped the handle of the sliding door, and asked calmly:

'Was it a very hard fight?'

'Well, I should say so. Charging guns is no joke. There can't be many of us left. But you 're some relation, maybe?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I dare say he may have pulled through all right, with luck,' said the man, with rough sympathy.

'Thank you very much.'

Lisl staggered back to her carriage, and managed with an effort to clamber up the steps. Her knees were sinking under her. She sank down in her corner by the window, and stared out into the twilight. And all through that night the same thought beat incessantly through her brain. He had been in the battle after all!

. . . .

Next morning they arrived at Krakau, and four nurses boarded the train, chattering noisily in Polish. They were full-breasted women, strong and healthy, but not very refined. Graf Mucki showed them into a compartment by themselves. Then he came in to Lisl with the astounding news that the train proceeded no farther than Tarnow, a couple of hours' run from Krakau. Their destination was properly Grodek. Beyond Tarnow the line was no longer safe. '*Épatant*—astounding, really! When our armies are still in Lemberg . . .'

'I suppose they are not there now,' said Lisl wearily.

'Really, an awful nuisance, you know. And I had got up a first-rate little speech for Grodek. We were to have filled up there with wounded, you know.'

'But you can make a speech in Tarnow just as well.'

'Oh yes, of course. Only there was one bit about the ancient knightly order sending angels of mercy to the heart of the land, and about the stricken heroes of the victorious field. Tarnow isn't the heart of the country, you know, being just on the frontier, and I suppose it won't do to talk about a victorious field. Have to alter the whole thing.'

'I see. Tell me, though, are there any field hospitals at Tarnow?'

'Oh yes, must be.'

Lisl had made her plans. As soon as they arrived at Tarnow, she would get hold of a car, and drive round to all the hospitals. If she did not find him in any of them—oh, if only he might not be there—she would drive to the headquarters of the corps, and ask and ask until she knew for certain. Yes, that was the best way. But things turned out otherwise.

The railway station in the filthy little Jewish town was crowded to overflowing. There were long rows of stretchers in the waiting rooms; even in the goods sheds and the offices. Slightly wounded men hobbled about in the confusion among a crowd of peasants and townsfolk with sacks and bundles of every description. These were the fugitives, driven from their farms and cottages, their businesses and homes; the washed-up wreckage of the war. They stumbled over one another in a frightened mob, wandered hither and thither aimlessly, or sat staring hopelessly before them. Many of them carried their whole worldly goods on their backs, women held their terrified children by the hand. And in all these wearied, tortured faces glowed a helpless anger against the horror that had made them homeless. Their throats were swollen with a single cry—a cry of vengeance against the shameful crime of war, that had robbed them of their homesteads and trampled down the ground they had tilled. The curse of the weak and innocent upon those who had brought this to pass! So they stood, huddled together like frightened beasts, waiting for the train to carry them westward into safety.

Into this scene of misery the hospital train drove up, a thing loftily imperturbable, with its red cross on the gleaming sides of the carriages. Graf Mucki jumped out and made his little speech No. 1, to the regimental surgeon in charge of the sick convoy. He introduced the doctor to Baroness Lisl—'a new volunteer nurse, who is looking for her husband in one of the field hospitals.'

The doctor politely told her all he could. His convoy was the last that had come through up to now, bringing such of the wounded as could be moved to the interior. All the field hospitals of the Fifth Army had been evacuated save one, which was at a village close by. All the bad cases were taken there. Lieutenant Baron Krottenburg would certainly be there, if he were among the wounded who had been brought in. And Baroness Lisl could, if she wished, commence work there.

Lisl thanked him. 'I think I'll drive out at once.'

The two men helped her up into a little peasant cart without springs—there was no other vehicle to be had. As for a motor car, to think of such a thing in Tarnow would be ridiculous. The doctor promised to telephone word of her coming

'Good-bye, and thanks so much. Good-bye.'

The overgrown Uhlan doubled up for the last time over her hand. 'Good-bye, Baroness, and good luck. Kindest regards to Moritz. I'm only sorry you're not staying with us.'

The cart rattled off. Speed was out of the question, for the way was blocked by endless transport columns with wretchedly emaciated horses. The animals were mere spectres, so thin that one could almost see through them as they toiled along in the thick dust of the road. The worst of them were led by filthy, ragged troopers, who staggered along at their heads. And in the ditches by the roadside lay the bodies of the poor beasts who had died in harness, swollen corpses with stiff legs sticking up towards the sky, like milestones on the road of death.

The villages on the lines of communication were not so bad. There were numbers of officers strolling about, their well-groomed appearance in pleasant contrast to the dirt and ugliness around. Carpet soldiers! One or two of them, she noticed, wore patent leather boots, and some were talking of improvising a racecourse in the neighbourhood. Every village had its share of these pleasant surprises. And as she drove through, the neatly shaved and carefully dressed dandies would stop and cast interested glances at the pretty nurse—exactly as on the promenade in Kärntnerstrasse, thought Lisl.

It was evening when the cart drew up before the village school, now doing duty as a hospital. Lisl felt the blood hammering at her temples. If only she might find him here! She ran up the steps, mentioned her name to the corporal on duty, and told her errand.

'I believe so,' answered the man in answer to her inquiry. 'I will get the list.' He fetched a register, and began turning over the leaves. 'Here—Krottenburg, Moritz Freiherr von. A noble, yes. Second floor, number 14.

'Show me up, if you please.'

Half-way up a sudden dizziness seized her; she had to grasp at the stair rail for support. The corporal was at her side in a moment, and offered his arm.

‘Thanks, thanks. I can manage now.’ Lisl bit her lip.

This ridiculous weakness! And she would need all her strength. . . . The corporal offered to fetch some water, but she declined, and with an effort pulled herself together. Then, like a queen, with lifted forehead, she walked the last steps of the hardest road she had ever yet had to tread.

‘Number 14—here it is.’

Once more she felt as though a brutal hand had struck at the sinews of her knees. Then . . . a dimly lighted room, with two rows of beds; a sickly sweetish smell . . . she glanced anxiously around, and there—there in the corner! . . .’

Lisl fell on her knees beside the bed, holding his hand, kissing and kissing it again and again. ‘My . . . my . . . my husband! O Moritzerl, thank God, thank God!’

‘There, there; nothing to cry for, my girl,’ said Moritz, in his drawling voice—his voice the same as ever. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

It was on the verge of autumn. A brilliant sunlight lay like cool gold over the land. The swallows gathered in twittering flocks on their way to the southward, and white gossamer threads hung in the air. The last days of that red summer were bright and lustrous as the first had been. Save for the cool of the mornings and the cold at night, the lengthening twilight and the growing shadows, the year might have seemed at a standstill. The war had spread itself over the harassed land, as if resting at ease for a space. The guns were silent; even the garrulous rifles had ceased to speak. The fighting now was in the west and north. In the forest lands, where there were larger villages and richer towns, the spirit of strife could better slake its thirst for blood. There was virgin soil there, fresh and abundant. Still, the war only looked forth drowsily, and made no move; as if still heavy with the fumes of that last August feast. And the spirit seemed to gasp: Rest, rest a while, and sleep off the heaviness in the many-coloured glory of the autumn days. Then to the feasting anew, to richer draughts of blood grown stronger for the respite. So the war paused, looking out towards the west and north.

. . . .

Re-establishment—an ugly word, of the same hypocritical ring as that other evasion: Re-formation. The Austrian forces, painfully retracing their steps, had reached the river that winds from north to south, separating the western territory, not yet invaded, from the middle lands. A river bend, if otherwise suitable for defence, is seized upon by strategists; it was here that the armies finally halted and offered a resolute front to the enemy. The Higher Command rained down orders and instructions upon the jaded men. Entrenchments everywhere. The position to be made impregnable. No giving way. Stand fast to the last man.

The men fell to work. For days and days the autumn sun looked down on grey backs digging deeper and deeper into the earth. Mound after mound was cut up into a patchwork of trenches, in rear of which the bronze mouths of the guns looked out from carefully chosen positions, showing no more than gave them room to speak. The Tiefenbachers were entrenched on a fine ridge, the ground in front sloping gradually down without a patch of cover for an attacking enemy. Not so much as a kitten could approach unobserved. In rear of the position lay a wood, and some sheltered hollows, where the reserves could be safely posted, with plenty of covered ways to the firing line. It was an ideal position, and the Tiefenbachers ornamented it with machine-guns, barbed wire, and mines. The sun laughed down at it all in applause.

The young Colonel, upon whom the whole depended, did not laugh. He tripped about from one point to another, and had a way of throwing his cloak on the ground when angry, and making a fuss generally. Sometimes he would shout and rave ; at others, he would adopt a reproachful tone, as of one most undeservedly ill-used. The officer in charge of a pioneer detachment had been instructed to build him a bomb-proof dug-out with a covered way in front. The work had been done, but not to the Colonel's satisfaction.

'My orders were, sir, I believe, to construct a bomb-proof shelter with a roof one metre thick. The roof is not one metre thick. I have measured it myself—ninety-six centimetres. Surely, sir, it should be possible for you to carry out my orders with something approaching accuracy. No, no—do not trouble to explain. I want no explanation, thank you.'

The sun looked down and smiled, recognising an old acquaintance. Colonel Peter Prapora—of course. Just the same as in the old days, when he had sat in his office writing the draft of a report with a Faber No. 3. The sun remembered him well. There was one occasion in particular when he had been furious to the verge of desperation. A new clerk had laid a Faber No. 1 in the place reserved for Faber No. 3. And the red pencil was not where it should have been, on the left beside the ruler—the fool had put it with the blue, behind the indiarubber. And such was the rage of Colonel Prapora at those misdemeanours, that the sun had been constrained to withdraw behind a cloud.

'Is that how you keep a place in order, you idiot?' he had roared. 'If I have to speak to you once more, out you go. You had better keep your wits about you for the future. Get me a couple of sausages, and look sharp about it. . . .'

Yes, the sun knew him well. How charmingly he played the piano, and what a favourite he was with the ladies, who found his handsome, appealing glance irresistible. And he was in high favour with his superiors, being essentially an adaptable creature, and invariably holding the same opinion as those above him. Hard lines on the Tiefenbachers, thought the sun. . . .

. . . .

Zillner stood chatting with Captain Pfustermeyer a little in rear of the trenches. In front, the men were digging and digging in the loose soil. The breastworks were already a metre thick.

'We could manage better without him, if you ask me,' said Pfustermeyer. 'Why on earth couldn't they let him stay at home in Vienna, and stick to his office stool! He 's no practical use here.'

Zillner's face wore an expression of hard-won resignation. 'It isn't a question of practical utility,' he said. 'It 's just a question of rank. And nobody asks how a man got his step, however plain the job may be.'

'You 're right. Oh, they 're a nice crowd our friends in the bottle green.' Pfustermeyer snapped his fingers. 'A beautiful lot of neurasthenics. I 've seen something of them in my time. All orders and instructions and big words, as if the whole thing was a conjuring trick. And what is the result ? The summer campaign . . .'

'Well, to give them their due, the odds were against us there. We were desperately outnumbered from the first.'

'Outnumbered—yes. But it needn't have landed us in that infernal mess. Our fellows were good enough. But what can they do when the bigwigs come down with their little *Kriegsspiel* plans and their big stock phrases—thinking they can win the war by out-of-date handbooks. "Ride them down—Advance without delay—Position to be held at any cost." It 's easy enough to say, as long as you 've no heart, and not enough brain to see the criminal folly of it all. They can't think in a straight line.'

'What do you mean by that ? '

'I mean that they think in curves and flourishes, and seem to think the enemy is fool enough to play the same game, just to please them. And when he doesn't, there we are—and it 's we who have to pay for it.'

Zillner smiled. 'What a radical you 're getting, Pfustermeyer.'

'It 's true, anyway. They 've no heart; it doesn't take long to find that out. I could forgive their putting on side if they weren't such hopeless fools. For that 's what they are. The Russians were three to one when they ordered us to advance "without delay," and they didn't even know it.'

Zillner made no answer, but his brow darkened. It cut him to the heart, yet he was forced to admit that the other was right. The bitter and merciless criticism of their leaders pained him, yet he had not the strength to speak in their defence. He would gladly have proved his old comrade in the wrong ; have shown that circumstances had been against them all through, and that no fault lay with those in command. But he did not dare. He had seen too much in these last few weeks, had realised too keenly the true state of things. He strove to repress the thoughts that surged up in his mind ; his soldierly spirit rebelled against the admission, and the conflict made him wretched. He had tried to thrust it all aside, but in vain. He had the accursed gift of seeing through to the heart of things, behind all superficial gloss; to perceive the merciless nakedness of truth which others would not see. And it was undermining his faith. That was the thing that tortured him most of all. He hated the sceptic spirit which drove him constantly to unmask, unveil; he would gladly have surrendered himself to a blind acceptance of what others were content to believe, and let his reason sleep. He was a soldier, and it was the business of a soldier to obey, unquestioningly, without criticism. He envied those who could still act up to that ideal. But for himself it was no longer possible. Something within him was always asking, suggesting, doubting. . . .

He stood in silence, gazing thoughtfully before him. Pfustermeyer laid a hand on his shoulder. 'No good worrying about it,' he said kindly. 'There it is, and we must make the best of it.'

But Zillner could contain himself no longer. 'No,' he burst out with sudden passion. 'It is intolerable. They cannot go on like this. It must be the end. They have sacrificed thousands already; sacrificed them to the empty theories they learned at school. But it has taught them a lesson. They will be more careful now. It only needs a little thought, a little judgment—and you will see, it will come.' His steel-grey eyes flashed as he looked over towards the eastern horizon. 'There is the enemy—there is still time to beat him back. And we shall do it. We must do it.'

'Heaven grant that we may,' said Pfustermeyer.

Behind them came the sound of a marching song; a detachment was moving up in rear of the position.

'Kaiserjäger! Let 's go and look,' said Pfustermeyer, grasping Zillner's arm. A Jäger regiment from one of the neighbouring positions was marching by; brown-tanned peasant lads from the Tyrol, most of them tall and heavily built, with pipes in their mouths. Here and there the slighter figure of a southerner appeared in marked contrast to the rest. They swung past with an easy, elastic step; dirty grey figures, with rough beards framing their sturdy, kindly faces. Many of them had burnt holes in their tunics round the camp fires, and there were not a few who showed sign of weariness or disease. But they puffed away at their pipes, and sang lustily as if glad to fancy themselves among their native hills.

'Good luck to you, lads,' cried Pfustermeyer, as they passed. 'We shall soon see what you chamois hunters can do with another sort of game.'

'*Ja, ja,*' they shouted back. 'We 're ready.' And one black-bearded giant cried, 'Let them come, the devils! Let them come, and we 'll send them home on crutches.' He grinned and pointed to his cloak, which was decorated with Russian badges all round the side.

The spirit of mountain and forest seemed to animate these men, bright, strong, and untroubled as birds in song . . . With firm heavy steps they tramped along, a compact mass of sinewy peasant lads, accepting their task with a childlike faith, and puffing in imperturbable good-humour at their pipes through stubbly-bearded lips. A hunch of bread and a slice of meat to quiet their stomachs were all they needed to keep them in fighting trim. They were the same stock that had fought in 1808.

'Splendid fellows!' exclaimed Zillner. 'Nothing seems to trouble them. And they have borne the brunt of it all along. Wherever there was a dangerous gap to be filled, it was they who were sent to fill it. All through the retreat it was the same. They have been terribly cut up. But they are still the same: splendid men! With troops like that we could do anything, if only . . .'

'If only the army consisted of Kaiserjäger, or only of Germans, let us say, and if our diplomats weren't such infernal asses, and our leaders. . . . What were you going to say?'

'Pfustermeyer, you are guessing my thoughts to-day,' said Zillner, with a nervous laugh. 'But I swear I only think them against my will. It hurts me more than you think. And, for Heaven's sake, don't go making it worse yourself.'

Pfustermeyer looked at him in astonishment. 'I don't see what you 've got to worry about. If it 's the truth, why try to shirk it?'

'Truth or not, I can't believe it. I won't believe it. Once you do—well, how can a man go on? If I really believed things were as you say, I should simply go to pieces.' Zillner's voice was full of earnest appeal.

The other shrugged his shoulders. 'I ought to have gone to pieces long ago, at that rate. But I haven't. On the contrary, I find it a great deal more comfortable to look things in the face.'

'You take things differently, I suppose. But with me—I must do one thing or the other. Either believe in it all unquestioningly like those Tyrolese lads, or . . .'

'Or what?'

'Or give up. Go to pieces. That 's all.'

'Shouldn't do that if I were you,' said Pfustermeyer, trying with kindly intent to make light of it. But a glance at his friend's face showed him that it was deadly earnest. So, laying a hand on his shoulder, he went on: 'You mustn't, you know.'

Major Blagorski was waiting for them up on the ridge. He was not in the best of tempers. 'Gentlemen, I must request you to attend to your work. This is not a promenade, where you can walk about doing nothing. You are expected to exercise a constant supervision. The Colonel was here just now, and had several complaints to make. One thing in particular—a man in your company, Captain Zillner, has been guilty of a gross breach of discipline, in speaking disrespectfully to his commanding officer. Nechleba is his name.'

'Nechleba! Surely, sir, there must be some mistake. He is one of my best men—a brave fellow, and a willing worker.'

'I must beg you not to take his part, if you please. This man, it appears, was *eating* at his work, and when the Colonel admonished him, he had the impudence to say that he would eat while he worked if he pleased. The Colonel has ordered him to be put under close arrest for five days.'

'Very well, sir.'

'And then, gentlemen, really, I must request you'—the old soldier turned his worn face from one to the other appealingly—'not to make matters more difficult for me than they are. You understand the position—we have a great deal of hardship to put up with, but discipline must be maintained. The new Colonel. . . . In a word, I trust we may work together as we have done up to now. And here is another order.' The Major read it aloud. '"From the General Commanding. The number of stragglers has of late greatly increased. The strictest measures must be taken . . . put a stop . . . prevent spreading further . . . fullest of their powers." H'm. Fortunately, this hardly concerns us. The regiment is practically free from that sort of things. It is mostly the Ruthenians, and a lot of those swine from the Czech regiments. Nevertheless, I must beg you to maintain the strictest discipline. There will be drilling in the afternoon, as usual. The Colonel particularly wishes the men to be exercised in the parade march, saluting, and the manual. I must therefore request you, gentlemen, to assist me in avoiding any possible cause of complaint.' One more appealing glance from the anxious eyes, and the officers were dismissed.

'There you see,' whispered Pfustermeyer, with a wave of the hand. 'Active service—parade march, saluting, and the manual.'

'Bottle-green idiot,' exclaimed Zillner, and hurried across to his section. 'Nechleba!'

The grey-haired infantryman clambered up from his trench. '*Zu Befehl, Herr Hauptmann!*'

'Insubordination—answering the Colonel—what on earth possessed you, man? You, a good soldier . . .'

'*Herr Hauptmann*—please—I only said that I liked to eat when I was at work. Not a word more.'

'You ought not to have said that. The Colonel has given you five days close arrest. You understand ?'

'*Herr Hauptmann*—I beg pardon—I can't see what . . .'

'That 's enough. Take your punishment like a man. Corporal, put this man under arrest.'

The man was led away, murmuring as in a dream: 'Don't understand . . . what have I done. . . .' But there was an undertone of anger in his voice.

And Zillner's tormenting spirit whispered: 'These are the creatures that are sent to take command of a regiment in the field. No idea of anything outside office work, utterly incapable of handling men. They would ruin the best troops in the world.' In vain his soldierly instinct strove to beat the whisper down; it was there, and would be heard.

Days came and went. Peaceful days, but laden with busy hours of nervous haste. The position must be in readiness before the enemy could come up. And it was to be made impregnable. It meant working and working without pause or rest. Day and night the spades rang on the stones, saws whined and axes rose and fell unceasingly. Every copse and clump of trees in front of the trenches was cut down, hundreds of bowed grey figures might be seen dragging the trunks away bodily, back to the lines, to shore up the trenches and bomb-proof shelters. The long row of hills beside the river, running in a graceful curve from south to north, had become a model of defensive engineering. There was a complete fortress, with breastworks, batteries, covered ways, and communication trenches. Barbed wire entanglements were spread out in front, pitfalls were dug and filled with greedy points, and mines were laid in readiness all about. Telephone wires stretched away to the rear, where the former Brigadier sat like a spider in his web, thoroughly in his element. He had been promoted to the command of the Feldkirch Division, and sat now comfortably installed in a farmhouse awaiting developments. As for the Russians, let them come. He had only to press a button, and the guns would thunder, the rifles spit and crackle. A word of command shouted into the telephone receiver, and from all sides came an obedient flow of detailed information. He could sit there at the rear, in touch with it all. Affectionately he passed his hand over the polished cases of the microphones—the last word in modern methods of command. There in front was the fist ready to strike, and here was the brain, with a nerve thread between the two. He rubbed his soft white hands in satisfaction. It was a war of positions now—the only sensible way of carrying on a campaign. In the open, with the armies continually on the move, the enemy had a disconcerting way of doing exactly the opposite of what one had hoped. One had to advance, to expose oneself, and never really knew how matters stood all the time. Always unexpected developments of some kind. Here, it was different. One sat surrounded by the most complete apparatus for giving orders, every instrument neatly labelled. The enemy had only to come, and then. . . . But the enemy did not come. That was the weak point in the whole thing. The enemy kept consistently a few days' march away, merely sending a few light-armed detachments of Cossacks out to keep in touch. Day after day the patrols reported that there was no sign of any infantry to be seen, far or near. Really, it was most inconsiderate of them not to attack; one had but to press a button, and they would be crushed!

. . . .

Evenings came and went. Pale evenings with a sense of weariness. As the shadows fell, Zillner felt himself drawn towards the dirty, toil-worn men in the trenches. They sat cleaning their rifles, mending their clothes, or hunting vermin in the draughty sheds of the cantonments, burying the recollection of the day spent in digging like moles. There they sat, chatting together, smiling, and discussing the chances of peace. Others were loafing about, or writing the regulation postcards home. They were glad of the evening rest. The post came regularly, with a breath of home air to one or another—affectionate, helpless words from a mother; or passionate outpourings of love, a sacrifice of blood upon the paper altar, full of longing and fire; or news of wife and children. And the dirty hands touched the scraps of paper reverently, and in front of the draughty sheds men fell to dreaming sacred dreams. . . .

Zillner never liked to disturb his men as they sat there occupied with their simple thoughts. But he would often go over to them as they sat at meals—the best hour of a soldier's day. There was a constant stream of gifts from home, '*Liebesgaben*,' with cigars and sausages and chocolate. The field kitchens also worked regularly now in these peaceful days of the war; twice a day, at eleven in the morning and six in the afternoon, the precious rations were served out. In the evening, when the Tiefenbachers were drinking their sweetened tea, he felt himself most welcome. He would go over to the sheds, and sit down among the men, and get them to tell of their adventures during the retreat, of comrades who had fallen, or what they knew of others who were missing. They invariably asked him when the war would be over. Would it be soon?—would they be able to get home in time for Christmas? And Zillner laughed; he knew no more than they. He spoke to them of their country, that was in peril and looked to them for aid. And that was a sacred thing—holier than Christmas Eve. And the men would stare at him then with wide eyes. He spoke to them of their duty as soldiers, a duty beyond all thought of life and death. The enemy must be driven out—that must come first of all. And the men nodded—they had not really meant it, about wanting to be home for Christmas. Even if they did not get home in time they must drive him out. Their eyes grew eager, and they clenched their grimy fists.

Zillner was happy at such times; he felt his faith once more glowing warmly within. There was no doubt lurking in his soul, no dark presentiment to make him desperate. They would win, after all. His heart clung to these poor ignorant men; only peasants and workers from the depths, but they understood what was asked of them. To such men, one must speak from the heart, not in the snarling command of a superior officer.

There were but few of his colleagues who understood this. They drove their men like a stupid flock of sullen beasts; only now and again would one of the junior officers speak to them kindly and frankly—their superiors never. The flowers of elaborate composition which appeared in the pompous official orders were but empty words, copied by dull brains from antiquated official tradition. It sounded well, perhaps, to call the men 'Laurel-crowned heroes,' after they had been driven with curses and abuse to slaughter. But the men themselves could not live on that nauseating brew, and felt no gratitude to those who offered it.

. . . .

Those evenings, so full of honest life, were much to Zillner. In the 'Palazzo,' a wretched hovel where he and his three lieutenants had their quarters, there would be supper waiting on his return. Prager, who had undertaken the duties of mess steward and cook, proved a wonderful acquisition. His general apathy entirely disappeared when once he was relieved from his military duties, and occupied in the composition of a menu. He contrived to produce all sorts of delicacies in the peaceful days in camp. There were Vienna pancakes, omelettes, pastry, and even now and again wine.

And the four of them would sit round in a circle, each occupied with his own affairs. Little Andrei hated the inaction; his young heart was greedy to be up and doing. The man of law spent a great deal of time writing to his sweetheart—or possibly there were several of them. The Czech was not a companionable fellow; he would sit there in silence, almost as if lying in wait for something the others might say or do. Often, when the Hungarian's eagerness for action found vent in a burst of ardent, stammering words, Zillner fancied he could see a smile of delicate scorn glide over Spicka's face. But he gave no grounds for complaint, and carried out his work conscientiously. A nuisance, thought Zillner. He has a bad influence on the men, and if he would only break out in some way, I might get rid of him. But as it is . . .

The evenings passed quietly enough. The young men dreamed their dreams, the Czech was busy with his own dark thoughts, and Zillner's mind seemed ever tunnelling into the black wall of the future. If only he could come out into the light again. Into the light! . . .

. . . .

One afternoon the first of the reinforcements came in. The Tiefenbachers were glad to see them, for these war-time recruits, with their new uniforms, brought a breath of home into the camp. The new arrivals looked about them with curious faces, that were still cleanly shaven; they came rattling bravely into the lines, men and kit all beautifully clean.

'Look nice, don't they?' grunted one grey and mud-stained spademan to his neighbour. 'Lice 'll be afraid to touch them.'

'Not they,' answered the other. 'They 'll be just as bad as the rest of us in a week.'

'Say a fortnight,' suggested the first speaker reluctantly.

'A fortnight, then. It 's all the same.'

The two grey moles had knocked off work, for the half-battalion was drawn up in front of His Majesty the Colonel. The officer commanding saluted with his sword. 'I have the honour to report, sir. Honorary Major von Rösselsprung, at your service, with 512 men. All eager to be led against the foe. I have the honour to place myself under your command.'

The Colonel stared, and the staff officers glanced at each other. Who on earth was this extraordinary Major von Rösselsprung, and what were they to do with him?

'Don Quixote as a volunteer,' whispered Pfustermeyer. And indeed it might have been the Knight of La Mancha himself, even to the lance, which a bugler, standing behind him, held stiffly pointing upwards. Von Rösselsprung was standing in his stirrups, a withered figure, with a fierce expression of countenance; like a weather-worn relief from some sepulchre of the days of chivalry. Small beady eyes under heavy bushy brows, and a high, sharp ridge of nose between; a thin little moustache, dyed black, stuck up aggressively above the withered mouth. A telescope and a prismatic binocular were slung crosswise across his chest, in addition to which he wore a compass, a big vacuum flask, and a small signal horn such as are used by the guards of continental trains. At every movement, the various articles of equipment set up a cheerful rattle and creak.

'Perambulating arsenal,' whispered Pfustermeyer, with a grin.

The heavy-armed warrior had lowered his sabre, and now proceeded: 'If you wish it, Colonel, my men can be allotted to their positions at once. We are all burning to . . .'

'Thanks, thanks. If you would kindly bring up the rear company in line with the first. I have a few words to say to the men.'

'Very well, sir.' Don Quixote made some mysterious gestures with his sword towards the rear, but no one moved. Finding himself constrained to issue his commands by word of mouth, he called out hoarsely, 'Captain Crlenjak—Captain Crlenjak! Bring your company—this way.'

A little mannikin on a fat but willing little horse extricated himself with some difficulty from the column, waved his arms about, and shouted what was apparently an order, though not to be found in any drill book. The spectators looked on interestedly at the exhibition that followed. 'Hi, you fellows—you at the back there—move up a little. No, this way, up behind me. That's it. Now straight on. No, you idiots—yes, that's the way. Keep your dressing, can't you? Up in a straight line. That 's better.' By dint of such exhortation he managed to bring up his men into line with the rest. Then excitedly, 'That 'll do. Stop! Halt!' And the manœuvre was completed.

Captain Crlenjak was a man about sixty, with a short, bristly moustache, and a dry, shrivelled face, that wore an expression of extreme embarrassment.

The Colonel looked the man over for a moment, and cleared his throat. 'Soldiers,' he began, 'I bid you heartily welcome, as—as defenders of our beloved country. Many of your comrades are no more. . . .' His voice broke at this, and he gulped out anew, 'Are no more,' with intense emotion. The eyes of the Adjutant behind him were watering already. 'Soldiers, you will do your duty. I know it. And I trust you to the full . . . Pig! How dare you stand picking your nose, while I am speaking? By Heaven, picking his nose! . . . Do you want to stand with your hands tied behind you, you swine? . . . And in a word, I bid you welcome, and call to mind the ancient motto of the regiment: "*Allzeyt fuer des Reiches Herrlichkeyt.*"'

'That is the sort of thing that goes to one's heart,' whispered Pfustermeyer to Zillner.

'And now, dismiss. The Adjutant will tell off the men.'

The Colonel marched up and down, with rapid steps, his hands behind his back. Then he called up the staff and the company commanders.

'How long have you been on the retired list, Major?'

'Fifteen years, sir,' said the martial one, 'but I assure you . . .'

'Really, now, really. And you, er—Captain . . .'

'Captain Crlenjak, sir, at your service. Twenty.'

'H'm. Yes. Very well, then. Major—the second battalion, if you please, and Captain Crlenjak the first.'

Major Blagorski saluted. 'Company Three is vacant, sir.'

'Very well, that will do. Thank you, gentlemen.'

And the Colonel walked off, his head bent, and his hands clasped behind his back.

The man of war clapped his heels together with a rattle of spurs, and introduced himself to his brother officers: 'Von Rösselsprung.' Then, sniffing like a trained hound at scent, he swung his head in the direction of the trenches, and barked out: 'First-rate position—excellent. And when are we to . . .'

'Oh, we 're ready enough,' said Pfustermeyer. 'But the other party isn't, it seems.'

'Not ready? You will see, gentlemen, in two days from now—in two days, I say, we shall have him by the throat. I remember at Maglaj, in '78, precisely the same thing happened. I was standing smoking a cigarette, and thinking of my wife—fine woman she was in those days, splendid woman—and then suddenly—Pst! Gone.'

'Never trust a woman,' said Pfustermeyer sententiously.

'Eh? What? The cigarette, I mean. Some measly vagabond of a Bosnian insurgent shot it clean out of my mouth. And, would you believe it, the fellow . . .'

'Wait a bit. I have an idea,' broke in Pfustermeyer. 'You can tell the story better sitting down. What do you say to a little something extra this evening—in honour of our new comrade in arms? I 've some claret that 's not half bad—a little I managed to smuggle into this temperance hotel—never mind how.'

'Bravo, comrade! I 'm with you,' croaked out Don Quixote.

'Bravo!' echoed the mannikin. 'Very happy, I 'm sure.'

'Very well then, you are hereby invited. At my quarters, at eight o'clock. An omelette, a hunch of sausage, with a cockroach or so by way of desert. At eight then, all of us.' And the heavyweight captain lounged off to make his preparations.

. . . .

It was a pleasant little feast. Pfustermeyer's jovial spirits seemed to shed light and warmth over the rough quarters, and infected even the taciturn Grill, whose face lit now and again with an affable smile. The Vöslauer sparkled in the glasses, and spread a cheerful glow through the veins. A touch of colour appeared in the sallow cheeks of the new Major, and his beady eyes twinkled. . . . 'Yes, gentlemen, at Maglaj—and at Doboj, even worse—only a double woollen belt saved me from death. It was like this. I was in the thick of the scrimmage—it was hand-to-hand fighting then. And suddenly a big Turk shouts out "*Allahi!*" And on the "hi"—*Huit!*—he lunged out, thinking to slit up my stomach with his yataghan. But you can see for yourselves—not a scratch. It was the woollen belt that saved me. Two layers, extra thick—a present from my wife. A fine woman she was in those days! And it warded off the cut, and here I am. Since then, I sleep in my clothes when I 'm on active service. You never know.'

'It 's perfectly true,' whispered Crlenjak in Zillner's ear. 'He sleeps in his clothes every night. Even at Krakau, the first night we arrived. And we were safe enough there. But he does . . . I don't know . . .'

'And the great lance, Major, the bugler was carrying to-day—a trophy, no doubt, from one of your recent engagements?' Grill asked the question with a deceptively innocent air.

'Oh, that? Yes, a genuine Cossack lance. That is to say, it might have been. But, to tell the truth, it belonged to a *Honved*[1] hussar.'

'Honved—Hungarians?'

'Yes, it was like this. We were riding up a little rise, reconnoitring, you understand. Then suddenly I caught sight of a troop of horsemen, armed with lances. Aha, thought I, now we 've got them! I got the battalion under cover, waiting for them to come up. And was just about to give the word—and then I saw who they were.'

'It 's perfectly true,' whispered the mannikin again.

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[1] *Honved* = Hungarian militia.

'He was just going to fire on them. . . . I don't know what he was thinking of. . . .'

The others laughed, but with some embarrassment. The fire-eating veteran proceeded to explain the encounter with the Honved to Major Blagorski, and, as he talked, the resemblance to Don Quixote was apparent to all. It was fortunate that he had got hold of a Sancho Panza in the person of his adjutant. Captain Jovo Crlenjak would no doubt manage to keep him out of serious mischief. Still . . .

Zillner glanced at Grill, and noticed that he was staring at the hero with intense disgust. The little captain was absorbed in his own meditations.

'How came they to send you to the front again after all that time ?' asked Zillner sympathetically, turning to the worn little mannikin. 'Twenty years, I think you said ?'

Crlenjak shrugged his shoulders. 'Oh, well, I volunteered, of course, in a way. We were asked to, you know. And so . . . you understand. I said to myself : "Jovo, you 've been struck off once as unfit for further service, even with the Landwehr—they can only put you on lines of communication, at the worst. And then, all of a sudden, I don't know . . .'

'Extraordinary ! Are you fit—otherwise, I mean ?'

'No, I can't say I am. Gout. In wet weather I can hardly walk a step. I don't know how. . . . It 's the same with the Major himself.'

'And you find it strange, I dare say, after twenty years ? Things must have changed a good deal.'

'Yes, of course. The drill 's all different. I don't even know the words of command. I was six years with the Supplies before they pensioned me, and after that I kept a café in Warasdin. Still, now I am here, I dare say I shall get along somehow. You shall see. I 'll do all I can.'

The last words were spoken harshly, defiantly. Zillner felt a sudden warmth of sympathy for the little man, and a dull anger against those who had sent him there.

This poor broken relic in the trenches! And the offices in Vienna, the safe and easy posts far in the rear, were filled with men sound in wind and limb. Hundreds of them, comfortably installed in berths as far removed from danger as in peace time, leaving the heaviest burdens to poor superannuated creatures invalided years ago as unfit for further service. Truly a strange thing, this country of theirs, the country that called for sacrifices from all, yet where such gulfs were fixed. . . .

The mannikin emptied his glass with a thoughtful air, then he smiled, and suddenly became confidential.

'Look you, brother, there 's another thing I ought to tell you. The Major—he 's always fancying things. The enemy, you know. Sees them everywhere—right up in our own lines, ever so far from the front. Outposts and sentries all the way along—the men were simply done up at last. Every cavalry patrol we came across, he wanted to fire on them. And his leggings—did you notice them?—he 's done them all over with grey. It 's perfectly true. . . .'

Zillner laughed, and cast a hasty glance at Don Quixote. It would be awkward if he should chance to overhear their remarks about his previous adventures in the field. But there was no need for anxiety. The veteran was sitting in a haze of cigarette smoke, earnestly engaged with Major Blagorski and Pfustermeyer in criticising the tactics of the Russians.

'And then,' went on Crlenjak, 'every village we came to he smelt treachery. The priests especially—I don't know why, I 'm sure—he always looked them up at the start.'

'There 's no harm in doing that,' said Zillner. 'Better be on the safe side with them, anyway. If I had my way, I 'd lock up the whole lot of them at once.' And he recounted some of his own experiences with those servants of the Lord.

'Ay, they are beasts, brother—beasts, they are.'

'On the whole, yes. Hypocrites nearly every one of them, ready to serve either side as suits them best.'

Zillner's honest eyes flashed. 'They should be turned out, the lot of them, after the war—to Petrograd or to Rome. Christ would not mind, I know.'

'You think so, brother? Well, I don't know. . . .' The mannikin stared at Zillner with frightened eyes.

But it was getting late. The candles flickered sleepily in the thick haze of smoke. Pfustermeyer rapped on the table, and cried with a ringing voice: 'Now then. One last glass for our new comrades in arms. . . . *Prosit!*'

The man of war was not quite steady on his legs. 'Bravo. Br-ravo,' he stammered. 'Soldiers all . . . to the last drop of blood. . . . Soldiers . . .'

The party broke up. Pfustermeyer followed von Rösselsprung and the little captain to their quarters. Zillner and Grill went off together. 'Madness!' exclaimed the taciturn one, looking up at the cold starlit sky. 'To send that civilian travesty to the front. Old men in their second childhood. It would be simply a massacre, if they were ever called upon to act independently. A massacre!'

Zillner looked up in surprise. He had never heard Grill speak with such warmth before. 'It is pitiful,' he said softly, as if to himself, 'to see these poor old men, whose day is over. We may laugh at them, but there is something touching in it after all. Here they come with their poor tiny candle, to guide the country on its dark road. And the light burns more brightly than the showy arc lamps of the overwise. . . .'

'Nonsense,' said Grill coldly. 'As if that could make any difference.'

. . . .

Then days full of a long-drawn tense anticipation. Anxious hours slow-dropping in succession: we are ready, ready, ready!

Those accursed Russians—would they never come? The line of hills stood like a row of giants armed for battle, ready to meet all comers. The muddy grey moles had dug and tunnelled into the body of the green earth, and sat now huddled up in their holes, staring at the sky, awaiting the first flight of the hateful yellow birds that heralded the storm of shot and shell. There was no romantic eagerness for battle, none of the delirious wordy fever with which war correspondents in search of copy filled the mouths of their imagined heroes. No hunger for the fight, no thirst for blood. These artisans and peasants who toiled so uncomplainingly were never heard to revel in sounding words. But a watchful impatience was everywhere apparent. It had been hard work, all this time, with pick and shovel, axe and saw; and they were anxious to see how it would stand the strain; to test their work, and see that it was sound. As a man who has built a house to be proof against thieves will find a keen pleasure in seeing them break their tools on its bolts and bars, and hear them file and hammer in vain, so the men lay in their armoured caves and waited for the enemy to try his strength. 'March them down'—that was no longer possible. But they might still, at any rate, 'Stand fast to the last man.'

The Brigadier, now Division Commander, grew more nervous every day. He had examined the positions, measured the thickness of the defences with a foot-rule, and found them to his satisfaction. The system of trenches was complete, fulfilling all requirements, and answering equally well to theory and empirical test. Everything here was in order, only the enemy was lacking. Patrol after patrol was sent out and reconnoitring detachments made long marches; he even sought to force the Russians to attack by a series of reconnaissances in force. But all in vain. The enemy kept his infantry three days' march away, and showed no sign of advancing to attack. Then the great man began to lose courage: it was logically inevitable that, if the enemy did not attack him, then he must attack the enemy, since the enemy was in their territory. But that meant abandoning all their elaborate defences here, and moving out once more to the peril and uncertainty of warfare in the open. It would be too exasperating. But, after all, perhaps. . . . There had been a faint sound of guns from the northward during the past few days. He would dearly have liked to finish the war from his comfortable farmhouse, with his telephone and microphones, and all his trusty apparatus.

And gradually the Tiefenbachers themselves began to show signs of uneasiness. The men were beginning to feel that their easy days would soon be at an end—and just as they were settling down so comfortably. The hardest part of the work was over, and there were amusements to while away the time. Meals, served up steaming hot at regular hours, letters every day, and in the intervals, they could fall back upon the pleasantly thrilling war of extermination against vermin, in which some had attained a surprising degree of skill. In a word the troops were beginning to succumb to the demoralising effects of culture and refinement, and were in no mood for further exertions. If they were sent out on the march again, there would be no more easy days of idling in camp, and no more parcels of comforts from home. The Tiefenbachers scratched their heads apprehensively, and looked up at the sky, where now only little white fleecy clouds were to be seen, and never so much as a glimpse of an aeroplane with the black-eyed circles under its wings. Only Major Don Quixote was filled with a violent thirst for action. He kept his glass continually fixed on the horizon, and dreamed grand dreams of the Order of Maria Theresa.

One afternoon Karl Albert Kraft came marching by Zillner's section, with a patrol and five Cossack prisoners. Zillner ran out to meet him. 'Fancy coming across you again,' he cried. 'How are you getting on ?'

'Oh, I 've buried some illusions—from the artistic point of view. Otherwise, I manage pretty well.'

'Illusions—in what way ?'

'Oh, well, it 's rather more sordid and miserable than I thought. I had expected something more inspiring ; more of the sublime. But that was long ago.'

‘It ’s not so long since you were wildly enthusiastic yourself about the war.’

‘Maybe. But I ’ve seen a good deal since then. As it is—well, as an artist, I’ve found war disappointing. As a soldier, I believe in it, and I think we ’re going to win.’

‘Why ?’

‘Well, I can’t imagine our being beaten by these animals,’ he pointed towards the batch of prisoners, ‘and their drivers. After all, the more cultured race must win in the end.’

Zillner smiled. ‘But suppose we don’t ?’

‘Then—But no, it is impossible. We must,’ said the painter earnestly.

Zillner grasped his friend’s hand. ‘Yes, yes—’ he stammered. ‘We must. That ’s what I tell myself, day after day, night after night. We must win. It would be horrible if . . . I ’m ever so glad you say the same. One must have faith—it ’s the only way,’ he added excitedly.

‘Yes, one must have faith,’ said Karl Albert grimly. ‘And never lose it. A soldier cannot live without.’

‘Ay, and never lose it,’ repeated Zillner slowly. ‘But if one lost it after all—what then ?’

‘It ’s hopeless to talk of that. One must cling to one’s faith like a drowning man to a plank. To lose it is death. But there is no danger of that. You will see.’

‘What do you mean ?’

‘I mean we shall beat them before very long. What do you think of my little haul ?’

‘First-rate. Out with six men and bring home five prisoners. Congratulate you. How did you get them ?’

‘Shot their horses under them, and they came crawling in, hands up, to surrender. A rotten lot.’

Kraft took his leave, and stalked off in triumph with his prize.

But Zillner’s soul was in a fever. The other’s words, ‘Never lose faith . . . cling to it like a drowning man,’ rang in his ears. Yes, he was right. Faith without question. No 'if,' no 'but,' no hesitation born of too much bitter knowledge. Faith such as that meant victory. He walked slowly towards his quarters, his face lit with a glow from the red sunset clouds. If only all hearts could glow like that sky, he thought—with the faith of that German soul. 'And you yourself,' came a scornful voice within—'Can you? Can you still believe? Can your heart still glow with faith? Think of the horrors of last August—of Rutzinger . . .' And another whisper came: 'No, do not think. Have faith! Do not look back, only believe!' And a third voice: 'Faith, faith! Cling to it like a drowning man. It is the soldier's only way!' And Zillner's soul flung itself upon the first little scornful voice, and stifled it: 'Silence! I will have faith—faith! Be silent.'

And the scornful whisper died away.

. . . .

Zillner found two surprises awaiting him. One was an order from division headquarters; the troops were to prepare for a march. Detailed instructions from the General Commanding explained how the reconstruction of the position had been effected, so that the army could now take the offensive, shoulder to shoulder, with their German comrades. It was also pointed out that operations were proceeding most satisfactorily on all fronts. Belgium was crushed under the irresistible advance of Germany; Antwerp, the last bulwark, was on the point of collapse. In Russian Poland, also a victorious advance. As to Serbia, the fighting there, it seemed, had assumed a particularly desperate character, while, on the other hand, there were prospects of a speedy and decisive result in that direction. And finally a peroration: 'Soldiers! A hard struggle awaits you, but we are assured of the justice of our cause, and shall fight on to the victorious end. Heroes! You will not suffer the enemy to gain a foothold in our land; your irresistible courage will annihilate the foe. The Blessing of the All-Highest be on your endeavours.'

The second surprise was a letter from Baroness Lisl. She wrote :—

'*October* 1914.

'DEAR FRIEND,—I am here in the hospital with Moritz. He does not seem to be getting on as he ought, and I am so anxious about him, so I write to you—perhaps you could give me a word of comfort. I was so happy; Moritz was getting better every day, and the wound seemed healing up so nicely. Then yesterday bronchial catarrh set in, with high fever, and the fever will not leave him. He is asleep now, thank God, but he is terribly weak, and looks perfectly dreadful, poor fellow. The doctor says something about complications, and thinks there will have to be an operation. And so we are going to Vienna to have it seen to. Do you think it can be dangerous ? Oh, how dreadful it all is, shooting and slaughtering. This hateful war ! They are all badly wounded cases here, but none of them is as bad as Moritz, poor boy. He sends his kindest regards, and hopes you will have better luck than he has. Keep well, and write soon, and say it is not serious.—Your affectionate LISL KROTTENBURG.'

'*P.S.*—It can't be dangerous really, can it ? '

Poor Lisl ! Zillner looked at the stiffly sloping letters that seemed running as if driven by fear across the paper. He could see her now ; pale and brave, and it hurt him to be so helpless to comfort her. Providence should be kinder, he thought, to old mothers and young women in love ; to hurt them was the cruellest thing in all the cruelty of war. Poor Krottenburg—it was hard luck. Perhaps he himself would soon. . . . But no matter. There was no mother to grieve for him, no wife. Clarisse . . . ? Her warm eyes, perhaps, would fill with tears ; his kisses pleased her more than other men's. Why was he so cynical in his thoughts of her ? She had not deserved it. She would mourn for him, he knew, in other ways than *that*. But would she care about his soul ? Still, he felt he had wronged her in his thoughts; he asked her pardon now, and kissed her hand repentantly in his heart.

He wrote to Lisl at once, pouring out all the comfort he could find, and swearing that a bullet wound in the chest was never serious, and bronchial catarrh a trifle soon got over. He looked forward to her next letter; was sure she would then be able to say he was quite recovered. And she must write again soon. Then he went on to tell the latest news. 'We are moving out again to-morrow, and I am awfully glad.' He wrote six pages full of the flowers of faith, and when at last he had finished, he saw to his dismay that he had only given poor Lisl two pages of comfort for her own distress, with three times as much war to follow. She would not be pleased, he knew. But what could he do? He himself was happy now, looking forward to what was to come.

CHAPTER IX

Rain, rain . . . the sun had hidden his face. Grey banners of cloud waved over the sky, a mass of torn and dirty rags, swelling out and bursting, fluttering along day and night, trailing their ragged edges over the tree-tops. A sea of mist drove over the earth, lashed forward incessantly by the wind, that howled out threats of deluges to follow.

Late autumn in Galicia. The summer is dead and gone, and a miserable world lies abjectly crushed under its bereavement. Birch and willow, beech and poplar, all showed rust on their green summer armour, and moisture dripped from them unceasingly—drip—drip. . . .

Late autumn in Galicia. Roads and fields all awash with mud, and death glowering out from the overflowing swamps. The wet, moss-grown thatch of the peasants' huts sank under the weight of the clouds, having borne the burden of the deluge year after year. There was no help. . . . And men and women saw once more that year the march of war trampling on their poverty. Lord, have mercy upon us! Women knelt before the Virgin of Czenstchau, whose effigy hangs in every cottage, and prayed : 'Holy Mother of God, have pity upon us, deliver us from evil, and from the Cossacks. Amen.' And the Lady smiled kindly down upon them, as she was wont to do at christenings, at weddings, or when funeral trains passed by. The grey geese flew in their snowplough formation high over wood and moorland, high above the dread in human hearts—late autumn it was in Galicia.

Grey columns trailed serpent-like through the deep mire; glistening no longer, but encrusted with mud and filth that weighed down man and beast. The infantry tramped along with tent-cloths over their heads, looking like so many grimy sugar-loaves. The artillery drawled to a cracking of whips to get along. It was heavy work for leader and driver. The cavalry stuck to the columns; it was impossible to move, save on the roads themselves. The risk of drowning they might have faced, but the animals were worn out. Softly nurtured in times of peace, they had no stamina left for further hardships. The riders urged them on with leg and spur, but the shrunken flanks had lost their finer feeling. The animals flicked their tails: 'All right, we 're doing all we can,' and hobbled along again with drooping heads. And far in the rear were the transport waggons, constantly sticking fast and being dragged on again. 'Hi! get along there.' And on a little way, and sticking fast again: 'Hi! get along.' And so the march went on. No halt, no rest.

. . . .

'Filthy weather,' growled Pfustermeyer, emptying the water from the right-hand pocket of his raincoat. 'I ought by rights to have been down with rheumatism long ago. Look at that!' And he pointed indignantly to the stream. 'If we don't all get mildew on the brain!' Zillner smiled absently. The rain had been pouring down for three days now—but what matter? They had covered a good distance, considering. The territory they had evacuated a month earlier lay now gratefully at their feet. Part of it was already behind them, cleared of the Cossacks, and not far ahead was the great river. Once that was won, all might be well. The Higher Command, too, seemed to have undergone a welcome change. There was no more rushing on blindly, but rather an advance by stages. True, the Intelligence Department was not as efficient as could be wished, owing to the wretched state of the cavalry.

'It 's beastly weather,' admitted Zillner to his companion, 'but I can't say it troubles me very much.

We seem to be getting on pretty well. Looks as if we might make a better job of it this time.'

'You think so? Well, I shouldn't be sorry if the bigwigs had grown wiser after their last lesson—which we had to pay for. But, as a matter of fact, I 'm rather inclined to think these new Fabian tactics are brought on by the weather; all this water on their heads has cooled the brains of our friends in the bottle-green. Once a fine spell sets in again, I 'm very much afraid they 'll find all have the Maria-Theresa fever as badly as before.'

'There 's not much fear of that—fine weather, I mean. What do you think of our friend the enemy, by the way? He seems an adept at running away.'

'He 'll pull up soon enough, you wait and see. Unless he 's taken fright at our fire-eating von Rösselsprung.'

Major Don Quixote certainly presented a terrifying aspect as he rode. His face was a lemon yellow, and he hung shivering in the saddle, the gout twitching and nipping in every limb. But his beady eyes burned fiercely, and his telescope was constantly searching for the enemy, while he muttered curses on them for failing to appear. The little captain, Crlenjak, spoke but little; he was suffering tortures from rheumatism, and every now and again would seek comfort in the contents of his flask. 'This miserable rain. . . . I can't make out . . .'

Despite the cautious slowness of their advance, the Tiefenbachers came upon the enemy unexpectedly. One morning the rain had ceased, and fields and meadows were steaming with moisture. Just as the head of the column came down into a little valley with a clump of firs below, there was a sudden spatter of musketry from somewhere unseen. The bullets flew far overhead, and there were no casualties. But it was enough; Colonel Prapora, in the rear, commended his regiment to the care of the Almighty, sprang hastily from his horse, and, calling for the colours, ensconced himself under cover, where he stayed.

Zillner, in command of the advance guard, dashed forward to the edge of the wood. Between these two extremes, the Colonel sitting and watching the white shrapnel clouds with great displeasure, and the leader of the advanced patrol reconnoitring the apparently empty ground in front, the battalions spread out fan-wise, and hurried forward in brave uncertainty.

It was a typical Austrian engagement from the early days of the war. Shots are fired somewhere or other—the enemy must be at hand. The Higher Command dismounts and takes cover. The battalions form up automatically in readiness for action, and hurry forward in thin lines. No one knows exactly where the enemy is, or what is his strength. The Higher Command would like to do something or other, but does not quite know what. That is the first phase.

In the second, the enemy has, as a rule, been located more or less—one can tell from what direction the firing comes, but his strength and dispositions are still unknown. At this stage, the foremost companies roll forward independently, firing and being fired on as they go, while those behind remain in a state of tension in reserve. The battalion commanders take no prominent part; they have taken cover somewhere with their adjutants and buglers, and are watching curiously to see what happens. Ought they to bring up the reserves on the centre, or on the right, or left? Hard to say? Which flank is the weaker? Their science cannot tell. There is an action in progress up in front, that is all they know, and there is a constant dropping of lead from above, which disquiets them in cover.

Third phase. Rapid firing all along the line. The companies have each got into touch with the nearest enemy; the men are shooting hurriedly, and wasting much ammunition. The staff is beginning to feel nervous—strictly speaking, perhaps one ought to order an advance at this point. Something must be done. But where—right, centre, left? . . . What about the reserves? Never mind, bring them up to the firing line at the nearest point. And no sooner said than done. The staff creep out from their cover and whistle and signal for the advance. The reserves dash up to the part of the firing line nearest them, throw themselves down, and open fire. Thus the attack 'develops.'

Meanwhile, the Higher Command is sweating with anxiety. Ought to do something, of course; issue prompt orders for decisive action of some sort—possibly an alteration of the existing arrangement. But how is it to be done? Between them and the firing line is an antechamber of death, where the air is alive with lead. No voice could be heard through that. Where is the telephone? No time to lay any line in the hurry of the unexpected attack. Consequently, it will be necessary to expose oneself in person. But that will not do—as a matter of fact, it is strictly against the rules and regulations. It is the duty of the company commanders and their subalterns, and in exceptional cases of battalion commanders, to sacrifice themselves; the Higher Command must at all times keep out of danger as far as possible. What, then, is to be done? For the present, nothing but keep under cover, and try to conceal anxiety by curses and exclamation, wringing of hands, or an impressive iciness of manner, according to temperament.

In the fourth and last phase, one of two things may happen. Either the leaders have chanced to hit upon the right thing at the right moment, and thrown their forces against the enemy's weak point and gained a victory, or, as too often is the case, the enemy makes a sudden furious rush at one flank, and always the one where no reserves were available. And the confused *maestoso* of brainlessly expended courage ends in an inglorious retreat.

This time the Tiefenbachers were in luck. Everything worked out all right in the end, though by no means according to schedule. Zillner had quickly discovered whence the firing came. On a hill rising gently from the farther side of the valley, beyond the clump of firs, there lay the enemy, almost invisible in shallow trenches. In front, and on the left of the slope, lay a village, the outskirts of which were likewise occupied by the Russians, with their guns in rear. There was but little artillery fire, however, and the effect produced was slight. The batteries were drawn up about a thousand paces from the ridge; the infantry in the village were a little over half that distance away. Zillner drew up his men at the edge of the wood; on the left was Grill, with his model company, and on the right Captain Crlenjak with his detachment. Pfustermeyer was in reserve, with his company posted in a ditch in the wood; Major Blagorski was with them. The guardian angel of the Tiefenbachers had caused the other battalions to extend out to the left, where a sunken road led up to the village. Colonel Prapora, who remained with the colours a thousand paces in the rear, did not approve of these dispositions; he would have preferred to throw in his weight on the right. His reasons for holding this view were not stated, but he was evidently displeased, and slapped his cape furiously on the ground. Meanwhile, the action developed, and soon the opposing forces were hotly engaged. The Russians were still but indifferent marksmen, and the Austrian artillery soon began to take part, silencing the enemy's guns after a brief spell of energetic fire. The losses up to now were but small.

The fourth phase was approaching. Major Blagorski stretched himself at ease by the ditch, with Pfustermeyer at his side. 'Time we were moving up,' he said. His withered face seemed rejuvenated by a happy resolution. 'Going on nicely to-day. And in the absence of the Colonel, I think—I will venture—to try and get in on the left.' He cast a questioning glance at the heavy captain, as if seeking for support.

'I think so too, sir. We can get up under cover of the village, and take them in flank.'

'Exactly—yes, that's what I meant. You will remain here, if you please, with my battalion, and hold the position.'

The old soldier rose to his feet, and strode off rapidly through the trees to the left. To-day, at least, he could act on his own initiative; no need to dance like a marionette while others pulled the strings. To-day his mind was clear; relieved of the dread of censure and the thought of what the Colonel would say. He walked with a firm step, sprightly as in the days when he was a young lieutenant, without a care in the world. He scarcely noticed the crackle of firing and the whine of bullets about him, and paid no heed to the flying splinters from the trees. His mind was made up.

Pfustermeyer had got his huge frame into an upright position, and stood now leaning against a tree, watching the progress of the fighting ahead. He was just about to throw in his reserves and carry forward the firing line with them, when something unexpected happened.

'Cease fire!' It was the withered mannikin Crlenjak. And as he gave the order, he sprang forward in front of the rifle muzzles, waving his arms wildly. Then, 'Follow me!' Crlenjak had no very powerful voice at the best of times, and only those nearest could have heard him. But at sight of the little skimpy figure racing away on his aged legs, the whole company sprang up and dashed after him. There was a little brook ahead; the mannikin stumbled, and went in up to the hips, staggered on a little, and stood still, in the midst of a hail of bullets. The men hurried after, splashed into the water, and clambered up on the other side, their leader all the while shouting and waving his arms. Then he sat down. He had brought up his men to within four hundred yards of the enemy. Grill followed hard on his heels. The model captain had the ill-fortune to run up against the jet from a machine-gun, and in a moment he had lost thirty men. Zillner and Pfustermeyer covered the advance; the firing line had been pushed forward now. In the meantime, the Major had brought up the second and third battalions by the sunken road, and had taken the enemy in flank. Soon there came a sound of cheering, and a moment after it was repeated from close at hand. The Russians had taken to flight, and the withered mannikin stood there victorious in the enemy's position, waving his arms wildly. Close behind him, Grill was pouring farewell bullets after the retreating foe. Not until twilight fell did the firing cease.

. . . .

The victors assembled in the village, at the house of the priest. The holy man himself was fetched up from the cellar, trembling and in no pious mood. He served up a meal in the musty dining-room; bread, sausage, and wine, which he set before his guests, not out of Christian charity, but for a price. And when this steward of God's mercy was invited to shelter the wounded, he burst out into desperate entreaties.

'Good sirs, I beg of you—think of my floors.' But he did not escape. Zillner sent off men to fetch straw from the well-filled barn at the back, and beds of a sort were made up on the floor of the biggest room in the place. The slightly wounded came in first, men hit in the hands or feet or shoulders, groaning, pale, and spattered with blood. A couple of bad cases were carried up; their faces showed already that mysterious change; an expression as of something remote, almost supernatural. They moaned slightly and asked for water. And when they had drunk, they whispered 'Mother.' But no ambulance could bring her to them there.

The priest stood with his hands folded over his stomach looking down upon all the misery and distress. Then turning to Zillner, he said: 'I see there are some among them who may be in need of the last offices of Holy Church. . . .' Suddenly he broke off, and his unctuous voice grew hard, as he went on, 'Pardon me, but there are no Jews among them, I hope. I could not receive under my roof . . .'

The young captain flushed angrily, and clenched his fists; he would have liked to plant them full in the bloated face of that priestly hypocrite. It would have relieved him mightily. A man who could speak like that at such a time deserved to be hung, no less. He controlled himself, however, and his steel-grey eyes looked the man up and down from collar to hem of his greasy frock.

'I do not know if there are Jews here or not,' he said sternly. 'But turn one of those men out of this house, and I shoot you on the spot.' He turned on his heel, and the shepherd of souls went off to collect his paraphernalia for launching them on the voyage to heaven.

It was nearly midnight when the Colonel came up. He was visibly moved, and congratulated the regiment, as he fell to upon his supper, eating with hearty appetite.

'Went off very nicely,' he said, with his mouth full. 'Almost exactly as it should.' Then catching sight of the wounded, with the doctors still busy among them, he went on in a melancholy tone: 'Ah, yes, the fallen—poor fellows! Terrible, terrible! Are there—any—er—casualties among the officers?'

There were two second lieutenants of the second battalion killed, four other wounded, and Major von Rösselsprung had been thrown from his horse.

'Very sad, very sad indeed,' said the Colonel. He then gave orders for the whole regiment to remain at its post in the captured position throughout the night. 'The company officers will, of course, remain with their men. We never know . . .'

The Adjutant noticed the looks of dismay on the faces of the officers present, and endeavoured like a good comrade to help them out. 'Don't you think, sir—we might . . . Our patrols have reported that the enemy are in full flight—and our men must be in need of rest after a heavy day. . . . The rain coming on again . . . might it not be sufficient to double the outposts?'

The Colonel turned on him in haughty surprise. 'Sir, are we at war, or are we not? The men do not require to be nursed day and night. Say no more, sir, if you please. The order will be carried out as I have said. The men to be at their posts within two hours from now.' And with a wave of his hand, the Colonel betook himself to the best bedroom to sleep for the rest of the night.

A general murmur of discontent arose. The order was unreasonable—ridiculous. It was pouring with rain, and the men were worn out.

'"Care will be taken to keep men and material in good condition," quoted one. 'We shall have a nice sick list to-morrow. Half of them down with rheumatism. Cruelty to animals—infernal shame!'

Little Crlenjak was murmuring to himself: 'Raining again. . . . Really, I don't know . . .'—when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

'Stay where you are, comrade. I've a bundle of straw there in the corner. You can take my place, and I'll go out for to-night. I'm not troubled with gout, you know, and it won't hurt me.'

'You, Major? No, no,' stammered the mannikin. 'I thank you, sir. I thank you, but with all respect—couldn't think of it.' Two weary old men looked into each other's eyes. Then the still active Major grasped the hand of the little Captain declared unfit for further service, 'even with the militia,' and, pressing it kindly, led him to his corner. 'Lie down there and rest, comrade. You did wonders to-day. I'll see that it's not forgotten. Good-night.' And the withered little veteran lay down, with a thrill of joy and pride.

Pfustermeyer beckoned to his brother captains. 'Colonel's sure of a decoration for to-day's work,' he whispered. 'Guess why?'

'For keeping safely out of it all,' suggested one.

'No, sir, that's not it. For finding his way back to the regiment, having to pass through a wood which we had cleared of the enemy, and a village ditto, all in the dark, and raining into the bargain.'

There was a shout of laughter, in the midst of which a stretcher was brought in. It was Major Don Quixote. His eye still flashed, but his black-dyed moustache had lost its martial trim, and hung down draggled and grey. It was indeed a draggled and grey von Rösselsprung that met their eyes now. So the Knight of La Mancha might have looked after his battle with the windmills. Sticky mud hung about him like the icing on a cake.

His brother officers gathered round him sympathetically. ‘What ’s this, Major? Not badly hurt, I hope?’

The fire-eater waved a hand deprecatingly. ‘Nothing serious, gentlemen, nothing very much. The luck was against me to-day. I was just dismounting, when the beast galloped off, and dragged me along. One rib and a leg broken—not quite the sort of thing one expects on active service . . . still . . .’ A twinge of pain shot through the grey face.

‘Oh, we ’ll soon have you fixed up again, Major,’ said Pfustermeyer encouragingly. ‘Little trip to Vienna, do the convalescent there for a bit, and then come back and join us in Kiev or Moscow. Don’t worry about that!’

‘Yes, but you know, that ’s not the worst of it. My telescope, binoculars, vacuum flask, and everything—gone! All the lot! Well, well. . . . I ’d better get along to the doctor, I suppose.’

And the shade of Don Quixote disappeared within, cursing the unlucky jade that had been the cause of all his troubles.

The other passed through the hall, where the wounded lay groaning and whispering half-unconsciously, and set off through the rain and the dark. Hoods were drawn down, and electric pocket lamps flashed out. The rain was pouring in torrents. The men were huddled up at their posts, covered as well as they could manage with tent-cloths and straw, or lay shivering with cold in the dug-outs. A stream of water flowed down along the bottom of the trench, trickling noisily over the cartridge cases of the late defenders.

Zillner drew a sheet of canvas about his shoulders. The men about him were snoring, despite the wet. Worn out with fatigue, they slept like lost cattle, like beasts that had learned to do without the shelter of a byre, and were now inured to hardships and discomfort. The outposts, forced to keep awake, stood gazing out into the impenetrable darkness, stamping their feet from time to time, to keep warm. The hours dragged on with heavy groping pace. Zillner found no difficulty in keeping awake. Not that the cold and the wet prevented him from sleeping, though the water had soon found its way through to his skin. He could not have slept that night in the softest bed. It was pure delight that kept him awake.

. . . .

Next morning the sun shone out, knowing perfectly well that it was contrary to rules and regulations at that time of year, wherefore it had hung little rags of cloud about its frozen face, and peeped through as if half ashamed to be seen. Nevertheless, the drops on the trees were grateful, and twinkled up their thanks before falling to the wet earth ; the sickly grass, too, seemed the better for it. Even the puddles shone with a golden gleam, and the windows in the wretched cottages sparkled. The sun! . . .

The Tiefenbachers had already marched for two hours of the new day, and were lying now in a potato field, ready for action. Orders had been received from corps headquarters to halt at a certain point, where the cavalry were to effect a manœuvre designed to hoodwink the enemy. And so the Tiefenbachers lay in readiness in their dripping potato field. The sun was drawing up the moisture from their sodden clothes, and they turned and spread themselves to get the most of it.

Colonel Prapora took advantage of the pause to give the officers an instructive little lecture on the action of the day before—exactly as at manœuvres. The officers stood round in a respectful half circle, maps in hand. Colonel Prapora had a decided talent for discussing questions of tactics ; he spoke fluently, and with the usual professional jargon of the expert, yet withal easily and, as it were, confidently. His explanations were emphatic if not lucid, and liberally interlarded with quotations from the handbooks. It was not, as a rule, wise to oppose his views, or suggest alternatives. Like a seer among the blind, he laid down the law to his flock, by virtue of that higher schooling which had taught him to create worlds out of the nebulous inane. And he fashioned his worlds according to his will, and was not pleased when any of his staff failed to recognise the excellence of his creation.

On the whole, he was not displeased with the results of yesterday's action. He approved of the rapid and connected manner in which the troops had been brought up at the proper moment; the eagerness and *élan* of their advance, and the prudence with which advantage had been taken of the ground, which, on the one hand . . . while on the other hand . . . etc. With regard to the final move, the attack on the flank, he was not quite sure that it had been wise to deliver that on the left. It was a delicate point. True, it had proved successful, still . . . by striking the final blow on the *right,* it would have been possible to threaten the enemy's line of retreat far more seriously, as . . . And he proved it conclusively, by the most delicate arguments expressed in plastic phrases.

Pfustermeyer nudged Zillner unobserved.

'I did not interfere,' the Colonel went on, 'for, as I have said, there was nothing absolutely wrong in attacking on the left. One thing, however'—his handsome blue eyes darkened as he spoke—'I must censure as absolutely indefensible, and that was the isolated rush from the front group. You are all aware, gentlemen, that isolated movements, however courageously executed —but you know that as well as I do. It is a point on which all writers are agreed. Supposing that the enemy had made a counter charge, and driven that company back—I ask you, what would the consequences have been? Who was in command of that company, by the way?'

Captain Crlenjak saluted. 'I, sir.'

'From a tactical point of view, the movement was altogether unwarrantable. What induced you to act as you did?'

The mannikin glanced round helplessly for support. 'I . . . I thought, sir . . . that . . . it seemed . . .'

Major Blagorski raised his hand to his cap. His bushy moustache was trembling. ‘Captain Crlenjak, sir, was the first to discover the weakness of the enemy at that point, and lost no time in taking advantage of it. I have reported his action as deserving of recognition.’

The Colonel was taken aback. ‘H’m, yes—a very plucky piece of work—certainly. I—er—certainly, yes. But from a tactical point of view, it was undoubtedly an error. And I must beg you, sir, for the future not to repeat it. Independent actions of that sort. . . . You understand ? ’

‘No, sir, I do not understand,’ said the little man firmly.

It was an awkward moment. The Colonel flushed angrily, and grasped at his cape—a sure sign of trouble brewing. Then Grill came to the rescue. ‘Permit me, sir,’ he said quietly. ‘Recognising the situation as critical—as you have already pointed out—I moved up my company to support Captain Crlenjak, and effected a lodgment at the same time.’

‘After me, if you please,’ cried Crlenjak.

‘Immediately after,’ insisted the model Captain.

The angry flush faded from the Colonel’s brow. ‘Precisely,’ he said, in some relief. ‘You see, gentlemen, how presence of mind and resolute action may save the situation at a critical moment. Captain Grill must be recommended for a like mark of distinction.’

‘As you please, sir,’ murmured Major Blagorski.

Captain Crlenjak was altogether confused. ‘I don’t understand. . . .’

The cavalry was coming up. The squadrons were spread out into a thin extended line, the reserves in close formation following up the rear. A whole division rode slowly across the fields, and was lost to sight in the next hollow.

‘Ah,’ said the Colonel, bent on improving the occasion. ‘You see, gentlemen—cavalry thrown forward to veil the movements of the main body, and at the same time acting as a bait to draw the enemy. Their orders are to make a demonstration and retire fighting, as soon as they have enticed the enemy to pursue. The enemy should then, as far as it is possible to foresee, follow what he believes to be the advantage gained, and will be drawn into a trap. We shall be ready for him here, and he will be finally annihilated by our artillery, which is drawn up under cover of the hills over there. A masterly plan; nothing less.' Pfustermeyer, standing with his hands behind his back, pinched Zillner slyly in the rear.

As Fate would have it, the masterly plan did not altogether work out as it should have done. The cavalry certainly did their part, but the Russians most inconsiderately declined to do theirs. Instead of falling in with the scheme, and carrying out the business allotted to them, they preferred to fall back slowly and in order, to the bank of the great river, where so many war games had been won and lost in time of peace.[1]

The Tiefenbachers marched forward accordingly. The skeletons of burned villages glowered like ghosts upon them all along the road, and peasants crept about like ghouls among the ruins. The images of saints that they had hung up on the walls of their cottages had availed but little to ward off tribulation from the home. The Muscovite is an orthodox believer, and cares nothing for the Romish calendar of saints, still less for the commandments of the Jews. And the black pennants of war flew high against the grey of the autumn sky.

Zillner glanced absently at the desolation around. He was in high spirits now, almost jubilant, and full of a deep thankfulness. He had regained his faith. From the innermost depths of his heart he believed, as he rode slowly through the devastated land in those autumn days. Success was waiting for them there by the great river, beckoning to her poor stepchildren in the Austrian ranks. Was not that rainbow there in the east a sign? Forward—towards it—through it. And then—his dreams went on—and then our country that we love will receive us in the hall of honour. Soldiers! And all will bow in admiration and say: ‘Behold the army of the people! An army of many nations, speaking many tongues, but with a single heart, a single arm. Hail to the victors!’ And the women would come, mothers and wives and lovers, their faces still drawn with pain, and whisper with the rest: ‘Hail to the victors!’ And the dead heroes would be blessed through all time. So he dreamed, riding slowly on, and his drowsy horse nodded assent. All about him fluttered the black flags of despair, but his fancy dyed them anew, to red-and-white, and to black-and-yellow. The holy colours that had waved for so many years—they would hang from every window in every street at the homecoming. And there would be flowers, flowers! . . . So he dreamed.

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[1] The river San, flowing into the Danube from the south, past the fortresses of Przemysl and Jaroslaw.

One evening he was sent for by the Colonel. In front of that officer's quarter, a neat and fairly well appointed farmstead, a fatigue party was digging.

‘What are you at work on there?’ he asked.

‘Bomb-proof shelter for the Colonel, sir,’ answered the corporal in charge. ‘Have to make a new one every halt.’

Zillner shook his head and smiled as he went on. It was really comical, after all.

The Colonel received him with unusual politeness. ‘Sit down, Captain, if you please. Ah—you are transferred to corps headquarters—dating from to-morrow. His Excellency has just sent the order through. Are you acquainted with His Excellency?’ Zillner was not. ‘Anyhow, it is a great honour, of course. Evidently, it means work on the General Staff. Do not forget, if you please, to give my compliments . . . and —er—I congratulate you, my dear fellow.’

Zillner went off, by no means pleased with the new arrangement. He was bitterly sorry to leave his company now, during the advance, and, worst of all, to hand it over to Spicka, the Czech, whom he had always distrusted. He hurried across to the Major's quarters; the old man received him in a red fez and slippers.

‘I know all about it,’ he said, as Zillner entered.

‘And I ’m sorry to lose a good man. What can I give you to drink?’

Zillner was most concerned about Spicka. The Major listened attentively to what he had to say, and promised to do what he could. ‘I will keep an eye on him,’ he said. ‘But I can’t very well do more. To ask for some one else would look bad—bad for the whole battalion. And the Colonel . . . you know . . . ’

Zillner handed over the company funds and the rolls to the dark-browed Czech. He would have liked to take leave of the men, but they were already asleep in their barns. He went back to his quarters, with a feeling of melancholy that he could not repress, and shook hands with his two subalterns. He was utterly miserable at leaving it all, and saying good-bye to his little Hungarian — he had never before realised how much he had grown to care for the boy. That night seemed as if it would never end.

CHAPTER X

'AND I hope soon to be able to inform our mutual friends that we have secured a valuable addition to our staff.' His Excellency smiled graciously. 'Can you sketch at all? Maps, I mean?'

'Yes, your Excellency.'

'Good! Tramhuber'—General von Kreutzen turned to his Chief of Staff—'Captain Zillner here will take over the map work at once. Zapperer hasn't quite the knack of it. Good-bye, then, for the present, my dear Zillner.'

The General extended his hand, and Zillner's first audience was over. He had been very well received. The Chief of Staff showed him down the carpeted passages to the billiard-room, where the department to which he was just appointed was installed.

'Pleased to have you with us,' said Colonel Tramhuber courteously. 'I understand it is a lady whom we have to thank . . . well . . . well . . .' and he glanced smilingly at the young Captain's slender figure. Tramhuber was a man about five-and-forty, but white-haired already. His pale, pleasant face wore a constant expression of thoughtful preoccupation, such as is frequently seen in men accustomed to severe mental work. The reference to the intervention of Clarisse jarred on Zillner harshly; he thought of his comrades who would have to lie out in the trenches in the cold, while he himself could sit at his ease in comfortable quarters, drawing maps, merely because a woman had interested herself in his welfare. He was altogether innocent of any attempt to make use of such influence, yet he could not help feeling himself as a deserter. The contrast between the life and work of his comrades in the regiment and this to which he had been transferred was accentuated by the atmosphere of comfort and luxury pervading the whole building, with its marble stairway and its carpeted floors. Certainly, it was pleasant to breathe such an air after the roughness and discomfort of trenches and cantonments. The lofty rooms, the costly furniture gave him a sense of well-being; even the landscape without seemed to improve when seen through plate-glass windows.

They entered the billiard-room. A huge table, littered with maps and sketches, took up the centre of the room, and at smaller tables round about sat a dozen officers of the staff busily at work. Compasses and dividers stalked with big strides over hills and valleys, contour lines and rivers. Typewriters clattered, and pens creaked over the regulation service paper. Otherwise, the work went on in silence, save for a word here and there. These were the men whose task it was to point the roads of the armies, and they were conscious of the importance of their work. Their faces twitched now and again with the strain of intense concentration; their brows were lined with vertical furrows, that stood like exclamation marks between the eyes. 'I am working! Do not venture to disturb me!' There were high brows and low among these elect; bald heads and heads of hair neatly brushed. Common to them all was the earnest preoccupation of the creative artist, the pious devotion with which they looked upon their work. Captain Zapperer, whose one idea was his own advancement, was bending over a sketch map, on which he was lining in with blue the position of the corps according to reports just in.

The Colonel introduced Zillner to his new companions, one after another looking up and greeting him with a slight pressure of the hand. Zapperer bowed with an ingratiating smile. 'Delighted, my dear fellow, I'm sure.' Then the buzz of work went on as before. In apparent contrast to the workers round about was a figure leaning against the big central table, and seemingly idle. As a matter of fact, however, he was no less occupied than the rest. Lieutenant Prince Rabenegg, of the Menelik Hussars, who had volunteered for service on the staff, had undertaken an important additional task, and was now contemplating his work at its latest stage. It consisted in sticking pins with coloured flags into a large-scale map, showing at a glance the position of the troops and of the enemy opposed to them. Day after day the distinguished old gentleman shifted his flags in closest accordance with the movements of the various units. It was most important to have the position correctly indicated. And the lines occupied by the Austrian troops were drawn with the most scrupulous accuracy. If those allotted to the enemy did not always correspond to the actual facts, this was, of course, solely due to the unsportsmanlike slyness of the Russians, who often had their reserves posted in places quite unsuspected by the General Staff. . . .

The Prince, a little fatigued by his exertions, turned from the table and looked out of the window, with that agreeable, somewhat absent expression, which gives so many Austrian nobles an air of supreme and unquestionable distinction.

The Colonel explained the position to Zillner. ‘Here,’ he said, pointing to a zigzag line of blue flags, ‘is the general position of the army; we have, as you see, advanced continually. Our corps is here, a frontal group in the centre, and our advanced posts have to-day penetrated up to the river itself. The enemy has retired to the farther bank. In a couple of days we shall be ready to cross; the plans are being made out at this moment.’ He waved a hand towards the busily occupied heads at the tables round. ‘Should the enemy attempt any serious resistance, which is hardly likely to be the case, we shall force the passage.’

‘I rather fancy, Colonel,’ put in the Prince in a tone of easy familiarity, ‘that we are pressing him back already. Our airmen report this morning that he is hurrying supplies to the rear. It will be something of a—er—a “*fausse couche*” for him here.’

'So much the better,' said the Colonel.

There was a small apartment adjoining the billiard-room, where the apparatus of the telegraph department clicked and rattled, and phonetic warning signals sounded like toy trumpets. From here, the product of all this mental power was transmitted to the troops in the field, the weary, filthy, and verminous men in the trenches were injected with energy from a distance, till they raised their heads and looked out over the sluggish river, on the farther bank of which the enemy stared back at them. The apparatus ticked, the telephones called insistently: 'Be prepared—be prepared!'

. . . .

At five o'clock the entire staff sat down together in the dining-hall of the château, a great room decorated in white and gold. Tall mirrors hung on the walls, the ceiling was ornamented with costly sculpture work. The noble Count who owned the place, preferring himself to follow the war from a distance, had given his steward instructions to show every courtesy to the officers quartered upon him. And the horseshoe table was resplendent with white damask, splendid vases full of roses from the conservatories, and an array of crystal glasses. The more material welfare of the present inmates was entrusted to the care of a portly lieutenant of infantry, who was delighted at having removed his *embonpoint* so far from the privations of the front, and threw himself with the greatest zeal into his work. Zillner was astonished. Was this active service? Close in touch with the enemy, and only a few kilometres away from the wretched hovels where the troops found shelter? Beer drawn from the cask frothed in costly glasses, bottles of claret and Gumpoldskirchner stretched their slender necks, the room was filled with the perfume of roses. The whole seemed like a sudden transformation scene, the work of some merry sprite from the days of peace, when feasts were made to celebrate promotion and honours conferred. But the wine was there to taste, and the beer, cooled to a nicety, proved it was no illusion. The dishes were excellently prepared, from the *hors d'œuvre* to the roast veal and the partridges.

'Do you always live like this?' he inquired of Prince Rabenegg, who sat at his side.

'Of course, *mon cher,*' mumbled the Prince, with his mouth full. 'He manages pretty well, our good Zangerl. If only he could have got hold of a cook that really knew his work. The fellow we have is from Zacher's,[1] it is true, but . . . To-day, for instance, those *œufs pochés*—really very poor. He is quite incapable at times. *A la maître,* he calls it. Simply ridiculous! Didn't you notice it?' Zillner had not. 'Really, you surprise me. *A la maître*—that is to say, in chicken broth flavoured with sherry and just a touch of bitter. Now that mess we had to-day—where was the sherry? And the bouillon. . . . Simply impertinent!'

The General sat at the end table, a typical Austrian officer with his fresh, florid face. The rest of the staff were seated at the side tables, and thoughtfully occupied with their meal. Opposite Zillner was the portly head of the medical department, and next to him a supply officer with a yellow face, who suffered from liver, and was digging peevishly at a cold chicken. At the lower end were the volunteer motor drivers, typical Vienna manufacturers, and the General's aide-de-camp. They were talking of the military situation. The general opinion was optimistic; north and south the flanks of the army had gained ground. The besieged fortress might soon hope to be relieved. And the *kaiserl. und königl.* administration had been re-established throughout the whole of the reconquered territory. Once at the river . . . and so on.

The glasses rang merrily. It was Eldorado, thought Zillner. Eldorado! And not far away, only a few thousand paces off, were the men in the trenches, writhing in mud and cold. No ringing of wineglasses there! Only the whip-lash of command. Here were the drivers, feasting at their ease, and there the beasts of burden, straining their hardened limbs. . . . Eldorado!

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[1] A Vienna restaurant, famous for its kitchen.

They had reached dessert, when another staff officer entered the room. It was Lieutenant-Colonel von Rechtentan, a thin man with a squint. He was splashed with mud from head to heels, and walked with rapid strides up to the Chief of Staff, and gave a message in a low voice. The Chief of Staff looked up in surprise, nodded, shook his head, and resumed his previous attitude and expression.

The General glanced at the new-comer. 'Been out in the mud, Colonel, I see. Anything new?'

'Yes, your Excellency. The Russians have this afternoon sent a small force across the river to the ground occupied by the Buttler infantry, though the orders most distinctly stated . . . '

'The details later, if you please. They are still on this side of the river?'

'Yes. The Buttlers have fallen back on the second line of defence. I would respectfully suggest that the battalion commander responsible . . .'

'Later on, later on. . . .'

A flicker of displeasure crossed the Colonel's face; he pressed his lips together, and answered in a low voice, 'As your Excellency pleases.'

Coffee was served, and his Excellency made a sign to intimate that they might smoke.

'Altogether inconceivable!' said the last-comer to the captain at his side. 'Can't imagine what he was thinking of, I 'm sure. With a loss of hardly thirty per cent., he falls back, and actually declares that the position was untenable. If I had my way—well, I 'd have that battalion commander tried by court martial. One must keep the troops better in hand—they will lose all perception of the situation.'

'Quite agree with you—exactly what I always say; keep 'em in hand,' assented the captain, a young man, with a puffy weak face.

'If I were his corps commander, I would order him to retake the position by storm this very day—if it cost the whole battalion to do it. What are the men for, if not to fight ?' The Colonel bit the tip of his cigar angrily, and his divergent eyes flashed.

'Precisely,' agreed he of the puffy face. 'Quite agree. . . .'

General von Kreutzen liked to take a hand at cards in the library after dinner. Messages of importance could be brought to him there ; it was frequently necessary, in issuing the orders for the evening, to refer to the General himself. The staff withdrew to the billiard-room, and work was resumed. The telegraph clicked, and the warning signals uttered their little tin trumpet blasts as before.

His Excellency played *taroc* with his aide-de-camp, the senior medical officer, and the head of the supplies. The cards fluttered busily, and meanwhile the table was cleared in the dining-room. An hour later Colonel Tramhuber came in with a black portfolio under his arm.

'Reports just in, your Excellency.'

'Anything important ?'

'Well, yes, your Excellency.'

'All right, fire away, Colonel, and let us have it. Doctor, it 's your lead.'

'Kravicek's brigade reports that the bridging operations ordered to be carried out have broken down for the time being, owing to the fire of the enemy's artillery. The leader of the pioneer company and twelve men fallen.'

His Excellency looked up. 'There is some one to take his place, I suppose ? What was his name ?'

'Barabas, your Excellency.'

'Barabas ? Extraordinary name. A good man ?'

'Very, your Excellency. Recently decorated for bravery in the field.'

'Really—a pity. Come along, Doctor, out with it. Anything else ?'

'I have ventured to send out instructions, subject to your Excellency's approval, to the brigade to remain for the present in the front line, and hold the position. We could then, in a day or so, renew the attempt to cross in collapsible boats, or on rafts.'

'Very good. We can talk that over to-morrow. Furtner'—this to his aide, who was studying his cards with a frown—'you 're a deuce of a time making up your mind. . . . Nothing else, you said ?'

'The troops are very short of bread, it seems. The same thing reported from several quarters.'

'Ah—here 's the man for that.' The General waved a hand towards the head of the supplies. The officer indicated—he of the liver complaint—thrust a yellow face out from his gold-embroidered collar. 'Your Excellency will permit me to explain. We cannot bake bread without floor. . . .'

'But there ought to be flour, sir. There is always trouble about the bread. You will kindly make the requisite arrangements at once.'

'Your Excellency, the transport . . .'

'Well, what about the transport. But, play, man, play, and let us get on. There! I knew it was there. The devil's own luck! The transport, you said . . . ?'

'Why, your Excellency, the state of the roads . . . and the late reorganisation cost us a lot of material, as you know.'

'Well, well, we must look into it to-morrow. I must get to the bottom of this. No, you don't—that 's mine. Anything more ?' His Excellency was beginning to grow impatient.

'The Collaltos report forty per cent. sick—chiefly trench fever and dysentery—but there are also cases of typhus and cholera.'

'That 's for you, Doctor. Forty per cent.—it 's scandalous.'

The senior medical officer's shining brow darkened. 'Your Excellency, urgent representations were made three weeks ago as to the need of a fresh supply of blankets. And the division commanders have been instructed to take every precaution with regard to the sanitary arrangements—the latrines in particular . . .'

'Oh, pardon, really, you know, just after dinner. . . . But, of course, the sanitary arrangements must be looked into, and without delay, if you please. Furtner, you again? Why, man, whatever are you thinking about? With a hand like that . . . well, well. . . . Anything else?'

'One most important thing, your Excellency—the regrettable affair which Colonel von Rechtentan reported this evening. I would respectfully suggest that the position ought never to have been abandoned at that stage, and should be recaptured immediately, at any cost.'

'I will ride out and look at the position myself to-morrow morning. The Colonel and Captain Zillner will go with me. Horses at nine, if you please. Is that all?'

'Yes, your Excellency.'

The General leaned back in his deep chair with an air of intense relief. 'Well, then, that 's done with.' But he was not fated to go on with his game undisturbed. The Chief of Staff was just leaving the room when he ran up against the flag-sticking Prince, who entered at the same moment, with a slip of paper in one hand. 'Telephone message, just come through. Important.'

The Colonel read it through, and swung round into the room again. 'Pardon, your Excellency. Kravicek's brigade report the enemy bombarding their position with heavy artillery. Serious losses. The Brigadier would like to know whether he is to keep his men there, or fall back upon the second line of defence?'

'Fall back? Unheard of. We do not fall back, sir, in this corps. Reinforcements to-morrow—instruct the Brigadier accordingly. And now, gentlemen, if you please . . . Haha!' The General turned to the table once more, rubbing his hands.

There was a whir and clatter in the telegraph room, where signals were being sent out into the night. And in the distant farmhouses, overworked adjutants sprang to the telephone receivers and heard : 'Hold the position at any cost—no falling back—reinforcements to-morrow. . . .' And the order was passed on, down to the very bank of the dark river, where grimy soldiers lay digging with hand and spade into the pitiful earth, that they might creep into its shelter. 'At any cost . . .'—the order that sent helpless men to their death. They knew not whence it came ; only that it had come, rushing upon them through the night. And so they dug. Crusted and caked with dirt, their fingers bleeding, they toiled on at their battered defences, still under the fire of heavy guns—'hold the position' . . . ay, hold it. . . . God help them !

The General, in his palace at the rear, yawned slightly, and decided it was time to go to bed.

. . . .

A little cavalcade halted by the windmill on the top of a little hill which rose gradually up from the wide, silvery-dewed fields below, with their tracery of ditches and little zigzag roads. Here and there a farm, or a village, surrounded by trees, looked down on to the great river.

'There, was it ? Yes, I see, I see.' His Excellency followed through his glass the direction indicated by the Colonel's pointing finger. 'Over there by the poplars—yes.' A row of trees appeared as a line, the thickness of a hair, merging into the horizon.

'That is the spot, your Excellency. The enemy crossed there yesterday, and is now occupying the position formerly held by the second battalion of the Buttlers. The regiment holds the ground from there.' Colonel von Rechtentan waved an arm to show the extent involved. 'On the right are the Collalto infantry, with their line running straight on from there.'

In the far distance, where the great river lay behind dark meadows, a desultory rifle fire was faintly audible. Now and again the dull boom of a heavy gun floated heavily through the thick air of the autumn morning. His Excellency lowered his glass. 'On the right—the

Collaltos, you say. H'm. Yes, they are good men. Very regrettable affair, the enemy 's breaking in like that. Thirty per cent., was it not, the Buttlers lost ? '

' Only thirty per cent., and then fell back,' said the Colonel disgustedly. He seemed to take it as a personal affront to himself. ' Altogether unwarrantable ! What he should have done . . . ' Suddenly little white clouds appeared in the sky not far from the windmill. Far up, and quite harmless as yet, but still. . . . Aha ! Closer now—and the first report of the bursting shrapnel is heard.

' They 've sighted us, it seems,' said his Excellency, with a smile. Then—sss—the rush of a shell overhead, and this time it burst behind them.

Colonel von Rechtentan changed colour. ' Your Excellency,' he stammered, ' pray do not expose yourself . . . your own safety . . . ' And, turning his horse, he galloped off.

The General waved his hand. ' Trot, my dear Colonel, trot.'

The spendthrift of battalions obeyed ; but his face was very pale. Zillner smiled scornfully, recollecting how bravely this man had talked in the billiard-room the night before. ' Scandalous affair, the Buttlers falling back like that ! A battalion—and what is a battalion more or less ! I would sacrifice a whole regiment if the tactical situation demanded. One cannot win battles without loss.' And when some one had mentioned twelve per cent. casualties, he murmured : ' *Charmant, charmant !* ' adding that it was a pity the idlers of the staff never came under fire themselves. ' Seem to forget they are at war at all.' The Colonel's divergent eyes glanced for a moment at Zillner, and the yellow face flushed. Zillner wondered if the other had guessed his thought. After all, he did not care.

The party trotted homewards, under a sky now once more safely devoid of little white clouds. In the courtyard of the château, on the steps leading up to the house, stood a man in civilian dress, with a grey cloth cap, and khaki puttees, with a camera and a big compass slung at his side. He raised his cap and bowed politely to the General as he passed up the steps, and addressed himself to Zillner. ‘ Pardon me—my name is Finkenschlag, of the United Press. I have a recommendation to the Colonel from his colleague there, and I should be extremely obliged if you could assist me. . . .’

‘ In what way ? ’

‘ Well, if you could put me in the way of a little personal experience of shell fire. . . . I ’ve never seen so much as a shrapnel at close quarters.’

‘ But why ? ’ Zillner studied the man with some amusement. He was clean-shaven, wore a gold pince-nez, and had dark melancholy eyes.

‘ Well, you know, between ourselves—we war correspondents are rather out of it in this war. The editors are always asking for something sensational and thrilling, and here we are packed away ever so far to the rear, and never see a thing.’

‘ But you write all the same ? ’

‘ We have to write something, of course. But for a war correspondent. . . . I assure you, sir, we are simply out of it all. Give them a little sentiment now and again, the spirit of war, life of the soldier in the field, and all that—but it ’s not enough. The public want more. May come across a hero invalided from the trenches, and interview him—there ’s always copy in that, if you know how to handle it yourself, but—well, you don’t get that every day, and in the meantime, we ’re eating our heads off, doing simply nothing.’

Zillner shrugged his shoulders. ‘ I don’t see how I can . . .’

The pressman caught him by the sleeve, and whispered in a tone of confidential entreaty : ‘ I ’ll tell you what you could do. Get me a permit for the front, the real front, you understand, where the fighting ’s actually going on—shot and shell and thunder of guns, you know, and all that. And take a few photos. . . .’

‘ I ’ll speak to the Colonel about it, if you like.’

'Thanks, thanks. I'm really eternally obliged. Oh, it's a dog's life, I assure you! You get a wire from the Chief. "Fighting going on, send something real." And there you are at the rear. How is a man to . . .'

'But for a professional writer, surely the imagination . . .'

'No good, sir. You can't draw on that indefinitely. Make five columns of print out of half a column of stuff—all very well, but it's not war correspondence, you know. Have to be in the thick of it, before you can get the proper tone. You see what I mean?'

'I understand. Wait here a moment, Herr . . . ?'

'Finkenschlag. Finkenschlag of the *Grosses Journal*.'

Zillner turned to go. But Herr Finkenschlag caught him once more by the sleeve, and with the other hand drew out a notebook from his pocket. 'Excuse me—just one moment. We have a special column: "Deeds of heroism at the front." You haven't a deed or so you could let me have? Something brisk and thrilling, in the good old Austrian style, you know what I mean? Think.'

Zillner shook his head. 'Afraid I can't oblige you.'

'Oh, I'm sorry. Nothing at all, you're sure? Nothing of your own, for instance? "Staff officer's race with death," or something like that? No? Well, never mind.'

Herr Finkenschlag stepped aside resignedly, and Zillner hurried up the steps. A few minutes later he returned: the Chief of Staff had considered the matter, and in recognition of the loyal attitude hitherto maintained by the press, which, on the one hand . . . while on the other hand . . . etc., had granted the desired permission. An open letter authorised the war correspondent of the *Grosses Journal* to follow the operations for three days, from the headquarters of a divisional staff.

Herr Finkenschlag was profoundly grateful. 'Thanks, a thousand thanks! Delighted to reciprocate at any time.' And off he drove in a Jew-cart, with an orderly officer as driver, to the front, the real front, where the fighting was actually going on.

. . . .

About noon, his Excellency entered the billiard-room, glanced casually at the reports, inspected the work of the flag-sticking Prince, and walked up and down for a while with his hands behind his back. Then he took out his case and selected a cigarette ; the watchful Zapperer tripped elegantly up and offered a light. His Excellency blew smoke through his nose, and said : 'Ha!' Then he thought for a moment, and went on : 'Yes. Instruct the division. Collaltos will at once proceed to recapture the position now occupied by the enemy force which got in yesterday on their left. The attack to be carried out with the utmost energy and force ; the position to be taken at the point of the bayonet. I will watch the operations from the tower.' The little tin trumpets spoke, and the order was passed on. . . .

Over in the village where the section reserves of the Collaltos were at dinner, came a sudden stir. Officers hurried about, and the men were called from their meal. The soup was emptied out from the canteens, a last chunk of meat was thrust between the teeth, with a piece of bread to follow, and the men hurried into the outbuildings for their rifles and knapsacks, swallowing as they ran. The battalion formed up, the Colonel and the Adjutant came hurrying down the village street, both looking very grave.

'Battalion commanders, if you please.'

A young Major, who had arrived the day before from the '*hinterland*,' with a battalion of new recruits, caught the Colonel's eye, and begged permission to lead his men to the attack.

The Colonel looked at him long and earnestly. Then he nodded.

'Forward. God with us!'

The lines fluttered out in open order over the wet fields.

'The poplars there; on to the poplars!' cried the young Major. 'Follow me!'

The storming party raced on . . . on. . . . There came a scornful rattle from the poplars: *tatatatata*—the infernal organ of the machine-guns—a whole orchestra.

The sturdy, red-cheeked fellows look and race on, over the drenching grass; the ground ahead lies flat as a board between them and their goal. Volleys, like an avalanche of pebbles. A ditch—down into it. The lines disappear, and the men halt under cover to get their breath. The supporting artillery sends futile missiles into the grey streak by the poplars.

. . . .

His Excellency clambered up into the belfry of the church in rear of the château. It was a trying climb. There is little to be seen after all; the distance is too great. But the General can see that the attack is at a standstill; there is no dark line to be seen moving forward over the green. Only the bare field. And a faint crackling of firing. His Excellency is displeased. What do they mean by it?

. . . .

Out in the ditch, the young Major sprang up with flashing eyes, and called to his men, 'Forward!'

And again they dashed on.

'Aha!' exclaimed his Excellency in the church tower. 'Aha! At last.'

'*Tatatatatatatatatatata.*'

A storm of lead sweeps over them from the poplars. The flashing eyes grow dull. A soldier's voice gasps out once more the last word, 'Forward!'—then chokes and is dumb.

The attacking column drops to the ground, and is not to be forced on. And in that bleeding mass of human beings, each man whose heart still beats, whose arm can still be raised in answer to his will, is digging, digging at the earth to hack out some shelter against the devastating shower poured on them from the poplars three hundred yards away.

. . . .

‘What do you say to that ?’ grumbled his Excellency, in the church tower, to his Chief of Staff. ‘They ’re not getting on. They won’t get through at all, you ’ll see. A pretty mess. Ugh!’ The General felt himself aggrieved.

The recruits had received their baptism of fire. And most of them were buried that same night under the alders outside the village. The young Major and ten officers were among them. A mound of only half-slain could be dragged off to hospital.

At the château in the rear, his Excellency’s card party was practically spoiled by the news brought in by a captured Russian infantry captain. The group under the poplars would, he stated, have been forced to surrender within two days at the outside, being isolated from the rest, and cut off from connection with the rear. They had already no food left.

‘Really most annoying!’ said his Excellency. ‘But how were we to know that ?’

. . . .

It was now a fortnight since Zillner had been appointed to the staff. He drew his sketch maps, accompanied his Excellency occasionally on reconnaissances; for the rest, he felt himself as an alien in the guild of creative artists. His soul ached with the cold-bloodedness of it all. About him, high brows and low worked away as before, still intent upon their lofty tasks, but there was a nervous twitching of the eyes that one could not fail to note. The vertical furrows on their foreheads had grown deeper, and a restless anxiety hovered about the room where they sat at work. The crossing of the great river had still to be effected; the enemy on the farther bank stood entrenched in strongly fortified positions; a brigade had attempted to cross on rafts, but had been repulsed with terrible loss. Pontoons had likewise proved of no avail. The enemy’s artillery was numerous, and had got the range to a nicety; any attempt at engineering construction on the bank was immediately destroyed. The hostile forces lay in their trenches on either bank, keeping up a continual interchange of fire. Individual zeal found vent in the continual sniping which generally takes place in such a position, but the front remained unchanged. The final blow must inevitably be struck on one of the flanks, and both sides concentrated forces at either end of their line with that end in view; in the south, in the direction of the besieged fortress,[1] and in the north.

Zillner noted with astonishment that the creative artists of the staff unanimously maintained the advisability of holding the position as it was, and proceeding with operations from there. The river was too broad for the lash of command to force the wearied men across at a bound, but the whip played over them ceaselessly all the same. The drivers at the rear continued to urge on the wearied beasts in front; no rest, no falling back; struggle on! If the river could not be crossed for the present, then mark time. The telegraph ticked, and the telephones shouted: 'Use every effort to improve the position meantime.' All save the men actually in the firing line were employed to the limit of their powers upon the second line of defence. In the daytime, the work here was seriously disturbed by the enemy's artillery. And accordingly, the telephones called for night work. The nights were to be utilised to the utmost. But lest the toiling beasts should forget that the need of other exertion might arise at any moment, the lash commanded regularly every day: 'Hold the troops in readiness to advance at a moment's notice. An attempt will probably be made to cross to-morrow.'

'At a moment's notice.' That is to say, the men were to fall in at three o'clock in the morning, with full kit. By eight, it was decided that no attempt would be made that day. The men were suffered to lay aside their rifles and equipment, and fall to at their spade work once more. Thus the whips in conclave in the billiard-room decreed, and watched impatiently for further developments. The waggon had stuck fast; the beasts that should have hauled it forward without a pause stood pawing the ground, with trembling limbs and heaving flanks, unable to move on. And Zillner's soul ached with the cold-bloodedness of it all. . . .

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[1] Przemysl.

'This is infernally slow, you know,' said Lieutenant-Colonel von Rechtentan impatiently, slapping the calf of his polished riding boot. 'Been here a fortnight now, and wasting ammunition to no purpose. If I were his Excellency, I 'd give them a touch of the spur. The men are getting demoralised, and the general *élan,* the spirit, of the army, is dwindling to nothing. No. If it lay with me, I 'd send a brigade with orders to cross at any cost. A regiment or two—it would be cheap at the price. Then the rest to follow—and there you are.'

A flame of fire shot up in Zillner's heart; a fury of rage against this man in the polished boots, so ready to sacrifice the lives of others, so miserably careful of his own. His fists clenched, and a voice within him cried out against the mean little soul behind those hateful eyes; the man was not worthy to unloose the shoes of the poorest soldier in the ranks of those who gave their lives at his call. But Captain Zillner, being an obedient soldier, bowed his head over his papers, and strove with himself, forcing himself not to look at the man—not to look. . . .

The flag-sticking Prince, too, went about in evident displeasure. He hovered round his big map, impatient to make some alteration; it was disgusting to have the lines there in exactly the same place for a whole fortnight. A whole fortnight, and not a move! Having nothing else to do, however, he generally drifted across to the stables, and occupied himself teaching his thoroughbreds to pick lumps of sugar neatly from between his lips. And here he might encounter the equally voluntary motorist, yawning beside his eighty horse-power car.

'Ah, my dear Loebl—dreadfully dull, isn't it?

War 's really not so exciting as they say. Wonder what they 're doing at the Jockey Club now ? If this beastly business doesn't finish soon, there 'll be nobody left to take a hand at poker when we get back.'

'Rotten time,' agreed his companion in adversity. And the two hung about in company, listening idly to the distant mutter of the guns.

. . . .

One morning the Russian batteries fell to bombarding some farmhouses where the reserves were quartered, and set them on fire. There seemed to be a certain method in the operation, for houses where there were no troops were spared. The question was debated at length during dinner, but finally his Excellency gave his casting vote for the theory that it was merely coincidence. And the heads of the staff bowed gracefully in assent. The squinting Colonel was particularly anxious to appear of the same opinion, as was also Zapperer, whose face put on an expression which would have done for St. John listening to the voice of his Master. . . .

That evening Zillner went down into the village. The little houses on either side of the street were wrapped in darkness, with no sign of life or movement, save for the willows and alders whispering sorrowfully up to the dark sky. Close by, a dog was baying into the silence, and from the river came a continual faint drizzle of musketry. Zillner felt the strife in his soul anew. Voices that had been silent for many days wakened now, thronged in upon him, crying aloud to him out of the dark, as on the day when Karl Albert Kraft had driven a shaft of light down to the sunless mazes of his consciousness. Have faith, and never lose it !—it was the only way. Ah, yes—those days had been bright enough ; he had thought his doubts at rest once and for all, had seen the radiant bow set in the east. And no other thought had troubled the concentration of his purpose : have faith ! With an intense, calm happiness, such as he had not known even in that grandly victorious August afternoon, he had dreamed on—on through all the misery and death and burning desolation, into the wonder of the rainbow itself, until—until the day when he had come into all *this*. This palace, where senseless pride, coupled with a vain energy and an extravagant prodigality of human lives, united to destroy the costliest element that still remained to those suffering masses of men ; the generous, unhesitating instinct of self-sacrifice.

The sceptic voices rang in his ears anew—and this time his soldier spirit had no longer the power to silence them. Faintly he bade them cease ; he would hold by his faith to the last ; die it might be, but hope to the very last. And the voices were silenced for a moment. Then one keen scornful whisper began again : 'Incurable optimist ; still dancing on the rope of a foolish faith ? Which is the better thing : Prince Rabenegg's thoroughbred or the lives of ten unknown soldiers ? Which is the greater, which would be the deeper loss ? The man would mourn for his horse, but over the grave of the fallen soldiers not even a breath of thanks would acknowledge their sacrifice. Consider, the beast is a trained irreplaceable creature, a *virtuoso,* able to execute wonders of technique upon the course. And the ten men—what are they ? Human beings, and that is all ! The next draft from the depot will bring twenty for each of them, but who is to replace the horse ? Incurable optimist,' the voice went on, 'rope-dancing fool ! who bade your heart suffer with those poor nameless ones ? Once you, too, spoke of War as the great deliverer, that should clear away the pettiness of the too easy days, and call up greater things in its stead. War ! In times of peace, even the meanest unit in the crowd is carried to the grave with kindly words. But here—your great deliverer thrusts heroes unnumbered into the common grave and covers them callously in haste. Quicklime is their portion, there are no laurels for those who fall in the service of the great deliverer.' But Zillner's soul roused itself and cried : 'You lie. They live, and are not forgotten.' 'True,' returned the whisper scornfully. ‘The phrase will dig up here and there a corpse, cover it with spangled trappings, and hang bells upon it to ring out the story of great deeds . . . put into his mouth words that he never spoke or thought, raise him on stilts that he himself had never needed, and lo, a picture for the patriotic Children's Reader! One of the many may be dealt with thus. But the rest? They may lie there in their thousands, and rot unknown.

Zillner wrung his hands, raised them in agonised appeal towards heaven, stared out into the wilderness of the dark, and cried, ‘Help me, my God!’

And lo, a star shone out. A star low in the sky, and near. He gazed at it in wonder. A star—in a sky black with cloud. One star in all the firmament—and now? What could it mean? The light died out. Then suddenly it was there again—gone—again—again . . . in little flashes, longer flashes. . . .

It was the Morse code. Dots and dashes perseveringly flashed through the darkness. There, on the church tower, was that wondrous star, flashing out dots and dashes into the light.

Zillner hurried to the guard-house, called out a patrol, and set off at once towards the church. The door leading to the stairway was ajar, a verger stood within. He turned to run up the stairs as the soldiers entered, but Zillner caught him by the shoulder. ‘Silence! Or . . .’ he pointed to the bayonets of his men. Then, beckoning to the corporal to follow, he ascended the winding stair. The belfry was in darkness; Zillner took out his pocket lamp, and flashed it round the place. And there, huddled up in a corner, was the village priest.

‘Ah, a reverend man at his prayers. At prayers, were you not?’

‘Mercy! For the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . mercy, mercy!’ cried the priest, holding his hands before his ashen face. He was a portly man of about fifty.

Zillner searched the floor with his lamp; the lantern had disappeared.

‘What have you done with it? Where is that Star of Bethlehem you had set in the sky to guide the Russians? Eh?'

'Mercy, I did not . . . Heaven have mercy. . . . Oh . . . ' And the shepherd of souls fell on his knees as if in prayer.

Zillner stepped back and looked at the man as he knelt. 'Heaven is not merciful to traitors,' he said sternly, and trembling with passion. 'Where is the lantern? Bring it out or . . . Do you wish to die on the spot?'

The huddled figure moaned. 'Holy Virgin, help me!' He fumbled with shaking fingers at the buttons of his frock, and drew out an acetylene cycle lamp, with a movable cardboard shade.

'I see.' Zillner held out the darkened star at arm's length. 'You have been telegraphing texts from Holy Scripture, that is all?'

The traitor's eyes brightened for a moment with something like a gleam of hope. This terrible officer was jesting—he smiled. . . . Perhaps, after all. . . .

He plucked up courage. 'I swear by the living God—I was only asking my colleague in the next village—to—to come and dine with me—yes, to dine with me on Sunday. I am a good Austrian, I swear it. . . .'

A strong hand grasped him by the scruff of the neck, and thrust him towards the window opening that faced towards the river.

'We can see what he says then,' retorted Zillner grimly. On the other side, a like star flashed and faded, flashed and faded; a tiny speck busily coming and going. The Russians were at a loss to understand the interruption of their pleasant conversation.

'Mercy, mercy! I swear by the living God . . .'

'Enough! Down—this way, sharp!' And Zillner thrust the man of God before him down the stairs.

His Excellency was most indignant on learning of the little intermezzo. Of course, it explained several little things that had occurred lately—the bombarding of the farmhouses, for instance, which had been conducted with such surprising precision. The priest and his verger were brought up for examination the same night. The house was ransacked, and a whole arsenal of Russian firearms discovered, with a huge store of provisions; apparatus for a subterranean telegraph connection was found in the cellar. The traitors were convicted on the spot, and next morning set up against the churchyard wall and shot. The priest himself had to be tied to a tree; he would not stand, but rolled about on the ground, curled up like a hedgehog, refusing to look death in the face. Both of them died as miserable cowards, with the name of the Crucified on their lips.

The same day a lengthy proclamation was distilled in the billiard-room, by the united efforts of many zealous minds, and addressed to all the authorities whom it might concern. The unpleasant episode itself was briefly referred to, but the conclusions to be drawn therefrom were dwelt upon most earnestly. Much was said about the manner in which treachery had of late ventured boldly to raise its head; how this was due to the lack of sufficiently rigorous preventive measures which were of vital importance to an army in the field, attention was called to the necessity of inflexible sternness on the one hand . . . while, on the other hand, the sense of responsibility . . . it would be culpable, again, to risk disaster by over-credulity . . . the strictest examination into every case where any suspicion had arisen . . . the keenest watchfulness under all circumstances where any such cases might arise . . . officers to act with discretion, but, on the other hand, to be constantly on their guard, and unhesitatingly pursue any indication tending . . . etc.

Thus the treachery of the priest was dealt with to the best advantage.

. . . .

That afternoon, Lieutenant-Colonel von Rechtentan came striding in angrily, evidently in the highest displeasure. 'Unheard of!' he cried. 'Altogether beyond precedent! Company officers, if you please, venturing to discuss and criticise the orders they receive. A nice state of things!'

Furrowed brows were lifted from their work, and paper-wearied eyes looked up inquiringly. Von Rechtentan squinted sharply across at Zillner, who sat bent over his sketching as before. 'Unheard of, gentlemen! I had gone out, at his Excellency's request, to inspect the second line of defence occupied by Kravicek's brigade. In the Buttlers' section, I noticed several of the captains standing in a group by the trenches—there was a major with them too. And then, slipping unperceived behind a bush, I heard—well, I can only say the most scandalous conversation that could be imagined.' The listeners pricked up their ears; Zapperer composed his mobile features into an expression *à la Napoléon* writing the death-warrant of the traitors. Von Rechtentan went on: 'They were discussing us, if you please. One of the captains, who seemed to be the ringleader, ventured to express the opinion that the constant state of preparation was merely a ridiculous nuisance. Our dispositions he was pleased to regard as an eternal fumbling about in the dark. And then—I give you the fellow's very words: "All this about probably attempting to cross to-morrow is either bottle-green humbug, to keep the men from ever getting a moment's rest, or it 's just pure lunacy. If the bottle-greens really think anything can ever be done after their last fiasco"—and the others agreed. Fiasco! . . . humbug! That is the way these ignorant idlers in the trenches venture to speak of our dispositions, while we are devoting our whole energy and intelligence to the conduct of the campaign. It 's simply abominable!'

The energetic and intelligent listeners expressed their indignation. 'Abominable indeed!' said the puffy-faced young man.

Von Rechtentan went on, fixing his eyes sternly upon Zillner. 'It would be well if the blockheads could be taught, once and for all, that their inferior minds are not called upon to criticise the actions of their superiors in the scientific conduct of the war. I would have them brought before a court-martial on the spot. A firing party—that is the only way to deal with would-be critics of that sort. Shoot them down, and serve them right. The army is the instrument appointed to carry out the plans conceived by a higher intelligence—not to dispute them.'

Once more the divergent eyes sought Zillner's, and this time the Captain met their glance. Zillner sprang to his feet, and his face flushed darkly. 'I would respectfully beg you, sir, not to speak in that manner of the troops to which I have the honour to belong.'

'Indeed, sir? Am I to understand that you identify yourself with officers who presume to criticise their superiors?' The Colonel folded his arms, and stared superciliously at the upstart. 'You take their part—very well.'

'I merely wish to point out, sir, that the men you speak of are neither blockheads nor ignorant idlers, but brave and devoted soldiers who are not afraid to . . .'

'To question the dispositions of the General Staff?'

'The General Staff, sir, may devote its energy and intelligence to the service—*they* give their lives. And men who give their lives may well be tempted to ask what is to be done with them. It is only natural.'

'It may seem natural to you, sir. I call it unmilitary.'

'The lives of men have been wasted like water through this campaign. It is hard on those who are willing to die—they ask to be *led*, not merely sacrificed.'

'May I ask what you mean by that, sir?'

'I am merely trying to explain what it is that tempts men to that freedom of speech for which you, sir, would have them shot. And I would ask you, with all respect, what should then be done with the leaders who do not lead, but only sacrifice those under them?'

Zillner had spoken calmly and slowly, and stood now coldly awaiting the other's answer. The superb intelligence looked on in tense excitement. Zapperer had adopted the pose of a Roman centurion: 'Crucify him!'

The Colonel hesitated for a moment, then said sharply: 'I do not care to pursue the discussion, thank you. I am a plain soldier, and not accustomed to deal with socialistic sophistries. But, after what has passed, I hardly think that your services here will be . . .'

Zillner smiled. 'You need not trouble, sir. I shall apply at once to be sent back to my regiment.' He bowed, and left the room.

The intelligent brows bent over their work once more, a trifle more earnestly than usual. The puffy-faced young man bowed and scraped, anxious to place his disapproval of the heresy beyond all doubt. 'Most extraordinary—incomprehensible! . . . But, thanks to the Colonel's resolute action . . . silenced completely. . . .'

Zapperer looked towards the resolute suppressor of heresy as on a glorious vision. Pose this time: 'St. Sebastian, pierced with arrows, sees the heavens open!'

Zillner hurried at once to the Chief of Staff, recounted briefly what had passed, and begged to return to his regiment. The order was made out on the spot.

Dinner that day was not a cheerful meal. His companions treated him with an icy reserve. His Excellency himself must have been informed already; Zillner fancied that the General, despite his easy manner as a man of the world, glanced at him now and again with displeasure. The flag-sticking Prince was the only one who appeared undisturbed; he chatted with the outcast in that tone of untroubled calm which Austrian nobles can maintain even in the most difficult situation, and which renders them so admirably suited for a diplomatic career. With delicate tact he avoided touching upon any theme which might bring out a difference of opinion.

'*Sans mot dire*, you know, a *bœuf braisé à la reine* is quite a different thing. This is a beefsteak pure and simple. Take the sauce, for instance. Can you, my dear fellow, honestly discern the faintest *soupçon* of Bordeaux in it at all ? And that, really, is the point of the whole thing. Beef gravy is one thing—*à la reine* is another. But that fool of a cook has the impertinence to serve it up all the same. Really it is almost enough to try one's patience. . . . *bœuf à la reine !*'

CHAPTER XI

Colonel Peter Prapora was by no means pleased at his subordinate's return. The friendly and confidential tone in which he had notified him of his appointment was gone. 'I am extremely surprised, Captain Zillner, that any officer of my regiment could conduct himself so unsatisfactorily in a post of honour. Your words to Lieutenant-Colonel von Rechtentan were altogether lacking in respect, and had better, under any circumstances, have been left unsaid. I must express my extreme disapproval of the action you saw fit to take. It bears witness to a turn of mind which I must confess I had never suspected in you ; for the future, I shall feel it my duty to observe your behaviour. I need hardly say that any repetition of such scenes will be productive of very serious consequences to yourself. Thank you—you may go.'

Major Blagorski was disappointed. 'My dear Zillner,' he said reproachfully, 'what on earth have you been doing ? The Colonel is furious. And he will be down on you, and on the whole battalion, in consequence. It 's really very awkward—very awkward indeed.'

Pfustermeyer and Grill shook hands sympathetically; the former was unfeignedly pleased to see him. 'Glad to have you back again,' he said warmly. 'Quite understand you didn't care to stay. I would have done the same thing myself. Much better leave the bottle-greens to themselves. They 're a superior lot, and we 're only common soldiers. But what says Schiller : '*Wir haben die Müh' und die Schmerzen, und wofür wir uns halten in unseren Herzen.*" You did the right thing, my dear fellow.'

Grill took the matter with characteristic calm. 'Not the wisest you could have done perhaps, but still, it wasn't half bad. Do them good.'

Crlenjak was not there; it was his turn in the front line trenches, and he had been out for five days by the river bank.

'You are to relieve him to-morrow,' said Grill. 'It is down in battalion orders already. It 's no picnic, I can tell you, sitting out there for a week at a time in the mud.'

Zillner was not dismayed at the thought. After all, he was a soldier once more. Let the Prince amuse himself with his little flags, and Zapperer take over the map department again, and the rest of them sit and sweat at their little tables—it was better to be a soldier. He went over to his company. The grimy, bearded, haggard faces smiled in welcome to their captain. Little Andrei came hurrying out from his quarters. 'I 'm awfully glad, sir, really—if I may say so.' And Spicka and Prager came too. 'Why, gentlemen, here I am again, and glad to be back. I hope we may remain together for the future.'

The colour-sergeant hurried up, drew out a neatly bound notebook, and proceeded to give the news of the past few days. Some new recruits had come in; twenty-six of them to Company Four, besides two gendarmes. Five of the 'old guard' had fallen, over by the river—shot through the head while in the trenches. The company now counted a hundred and forty men.[1] There was some cholera about; there had been vaccination the day before. None of their company had shown symptoms as yet, but twelve men of the second battalion had died. General health pretty fair; a little typhus, that was all. But the bread was very bad—most of it absolutely rotten. The division supplies were short, and there was only a little flour, and that poor, to be had in the village. The men really didn't get enough to eat. But perhaps—the colour-sergeant hesitated—perhaps the Captain could manage something. . . .

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[1] Instead of two hundred and fifty.

So Zillner found himself once more immersed in the endless administrative details of his command ; a sea of troublesome little matters in which a company commander at the front will sink hopelessly if he have not the head and heart to keep himself up. It needed, too, an iron will. And Zillner was not lacking in that respect. His heart went out to these poor grimy fellows, who were tractable as children if only they were decently treated. He often felt as if they had given their hearts into his hand, young and old, with a touching confidence, that begged him to deal kindly with them. 'We are only poor ignorant fellows,' they seemed to say, 'and you are our leader. Do not trample on us, but be kind, and we will bless you, and follow where you will.' For three months now Zillner had been gradually gaining the hearts of his men : he had lived with them through weary nights, and faced death by their side. And now they gathered about him once more, asking his sympathy, and offering their devotion.

Zillner could not help feeling that way about his men. Perhaps it was only a fancy of his, but still. . . . He could look into their eyes, and see that they did not lie. Only poor devils in the ranks, with little between them and death—if their eyes lit up because their Captain had come back, what could it mean but that they were honestly glad to see him ? And that light in their eyes was more precious to him than all the laurels and heroics of official recognition, which, after all, springs but from cold brains. That light in the eyes of his men was something which not all the official orders ever issued could command. And it gladdened him to see. Suddenly he remembered the new-comers—six-and-twenty cowering little souls full of instinctive distrust. He would go and see what he could make of them at once.

The recruits fell in, standing stiffly upright, with fingers rigidly extended down behind their trouser pockets, and eyes staring blankly and strainedly to their front. One of them, a front-rank man, second from the farther end—where had he seen that face before? A pale, nervous face, with restless features and black curling hair. He stepped up to the man, who was staring blankly before him under his ridiculous regulation cap.

‘What is your name, my man?’

‘Johann Nimmersatt.’

The dreamy blue eyes still stared straight to the front. And suddenly Zillner remembered. This was the fellow who . . .

‘I have seen you before,’ he said. ‘You made a speech at the Grabencafe in Vienna, on the night of the 2nd of August?’

‘Yes. They threw me out.’

Zillner dismissed the rest, and bade this man stay behind. ‘Strange, your turning up here,’ he said. The man made no answer. ‘I don’t know, of course. You may have changed your mind since then. But, in any case—no more speeches of that kind, if you please, among your comrades here. You understand me?’

The dreamy blue eyes turned reluctantly back to earth, and looked into his with a steady fire. ‘*Herr Hauptmann*—I have not changed. I think to-day as I did then. I can’t help it. I hate it—this massacre by order.’

‘That’s nonsense, my man. Don’t let yourself be led away by catchwords. There are things in the world that neither you nor I can alter, whatever we may feel. But, mark me—if I find you preaching that sort of thing here—if you attempt to influence the men—you will be severely punished.’

The boy’s eyes filled with tears, and his lips trembled. ‘I won’t,’ he whispered—‘won’t say a word. I’ll do my duty, like the rest, and go out and murder as my brothers here must do, but I shall hate it in my soul; hate and curse the war, and nothing can make me feel differently.’ He was silent for a moment, and then burst out: ‘They are my brothers—and I love them all.’ His knees and hands trembled, and his voice was broken with sobs. '*Herr Hauptmann,* do not suspect me. . . . I will do my duty—do it all . . . '

Zillner laid a hand encouragingly on his shoulder. 'There, I trust you, then. And now pull yourself together, like a man.'

Zillner felt the passion that burned in this young soul lay hold upon his own. Here was a man in whose mind another world had come into conflict with his own; the world whose scaffolding had been raised two thousand years before, by a carpenter's Son, and which had not reached beyond.

'Go along now to your quarters; I trust you.'

The young man whispered a word of thanks and went.

A new thought dawned slowly upon Zillner's mind. Those two worlds—they were not irreconcilable after all. They met and touched at a single point—in love for the poor and weak ones of the earth. Might not he himself, searching into the depths of his heart, find there, professional soldier that he was, the same conviction that burned in the heart of this poor conscript? No, it was too ridiculous! Their worlds were far removed. Had not he but lately confirmed his faith in all that the other hated? True, he loved the poor and weak, as this boy did, and hated the unfeeling hearts that sacrificed them in vain. But there was a difference. The sacrifice itself was to his mind a natural necessity, ancient and lasting as humanity itself. He knew that the country called for blood upon its altars, that it might grow rich and powerful; his anger was against the High Priests, the Pharisees, and hypocrites, who led their victims heedlessly, fruitlessly to the slaughter. No, the thought was absurd, he would not harbour it. But it did not leave him; only crept into hiding in the depths. Thoughts that once have risen in the mind cannot die; they can at most be laid aside as mummied things. And when the hour comes, they wake again, looking out with insolent or humble eyes, as it may be.

. . . .

The time came round for Zillner to relieve the little

Captain in his trenches. It was a cold, moonlight evening. Silently, with the scabbards of their bayonets muffled in straw, the men marched out through the shimmering meadows towards the belt of thicket that stood like a black wall in front of the river.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of musketry, desultory firing from patrols exchanging shots. Day and night it went on, and the men had grown so used to the sound that they noticed it as little as the ticking of a clock. It was only when the posts were relieved that greater caution was necessary ; as soon as the Russians perceived a detachment moving out, they flooded the whole of the ground with a furious fire. The reliefs, therefore, were invariably sent out by night, for the flat country offered no cover. Quietly the foremost ranks slipped into the shelter of the willows. Bullets were dropping close by. Down, and listen ! No—only shots intended for the trenches on ahead, that had passed beyond their mark.

'Forward ! ' A few steps more through the thicket on the river bank, and then down into the communication trench. Along this they moved, bending down to keep under cover, and reached the full depth of the front line trenches. A little in front lay the gleaming line of the river itself.

The withered mannikin came hobbling painfully out to meet his relief. 'Here you are ! No news from over there. As for me, no better. That infernal gout—I can hardly walk. It 's beastly wet here.' Crlenjak led the way along the trench. 'Bend down, you 're tall for this work. And they 've got their eye in now—plenty of practice.'

The warning was well-timed. Bullets swept sharply over the breastwork, and buried themselves with a dull thud in the earth behind. The little man clambered up to a slit in the bank. 'I 've got the observation post here—there 's a good view across. The Russians are right on the other bank, about four hundred paces.'

He pointed out the enemy's line, standing out sharply in the moonlight. 'The days are long, brother—take it as coolly as you can. Good night!'

The little Captain hobbled off, followed by his men, and Zillner proceeded to install himself in his new position. A strange life! Three nights ago he had been lying in a soft bed with a silken coverlet; now, huddled up like a mole in the wet earth. He posted his men, sent off patrols to either flank to make connection with the neighbouring lines, and telephoned back to battalion headquarters that he had taken over the section. The men crept into the straw-lined dug-outs, curled themselves up, and were soon snoring. The officers stayed by their respective commands. Zillner inspected his own quarters—a little burrow in two compartments, the sides shored up with planks; he had to creep on all fours. He could lie down at full length inside, but there was a constant dripping of water from the roof and walls. It was a bright starlight night. The monotonously repeated thud of bullets striking the earthworks on all sides was interrupted now and again by the shriek of an owl, or by a sudden burst of firing from a machine-gun.

Zillner crept into his sleeping-bag, fell asleep at once, and dreamed of his mother. 'Mind you don't catch cold, my dear boy,' said the kindly, anxious voice. 'It is very damp in here. And have you your woollen underclothes on, and your warm socks? Let me . . .' And he was glad to have her there beside him, and reached out for her hand to kiss it. But his fingers touched the clammy wall, and he awoke.

There was a faint crackling of firing outside. A sudden weakness came over him; he felt almost on the point of weeping.

Seven days and nights! Spent in a lover's arms, with kisses and tender words, it is a little while, a time of triumphant gladness. Or on a journey in a foreign country, with a travelling trunk in the rack above; all cares thrust away into a corner of the everyday life that is left behind, and the present full of new impressions, rich and varied. Seven days! A trifle! Or sitting at work, busied upon some problem that occupies the mind —the hours fly past in a cloud of cigarette smoke; the seven days and nights are suddenly past, as in a dream, and only the nervous reaction is left. Or seven days in pursuit of the enemy, hurrying after as he hurries in flight. Time and space disappear, hours, days, and nights melt in a glow of victorious excitement. . . . Only in the trenches, with death knocking at the door without, or glowering down from a leaden sky, and nothing to do but sit and wait in a world two hundred paces long, and but a single pace wide—there, seven days and nights drag on unendingly! So Zillner thought, sitting there under the dull milky grey of the autumn sky.

Day after day crept up, shivering drowsily, sleepily, hung with empty eyes over the trenches, and slowly passed. Now and again a shell or so whined overhead, on the way to some selected farmhouse in the rear. So the time dragged on.

Prager, who was of an inventive turn of mind, had built up a sort of stove in his dug-out, chiefly from old meat tins. It gave out a certain amount of warmth, and a great deal of smoke. The nights passed in visits of inspection, and spells of broken sleep. One or two of the men, with more initiative than the rest, used the hours of darkness to go and dig potatoes in a field close by, creeping out on all fours from the trench, and returning in the same way. On one such expedition a man was shot; otherwise there were but few casualties. The fallen were buried among the willows by the communication trench.

One day, Nechleba and the recruit Nimmersatt were standing side by side on the look-out, when suddenly they noticed a movement in the enemy position, that lay like a huge caterpillar on the farther bank. A man was creeping out; he stood up, strolled over to a willow tree close by, and began cutting twigs as calmly as could be.

Nechleba's eyes flashed. 'There's your chance, youngster. Pick him off! Aim at the knees, and you 've got him.'

Nimmersatt looked at him in horror. 'Shoot him—like that—in cold blood. No, no, I couldn't.'

'All right then, softy, I will.' The veteran threw his rifle to his shoulder, took a careful aim, and fired. The report rang out sharply across the water; the figure by the trees flung up its arms, toppled over, and lay stretched out stiffly.

'Heart,' muttered Nechleba, with a satisfied grin. And, turning to the recruit, he went on: 'Now, you saw the way he fell. Arms up in the air, and then plump over! That means shot through the heart. It 's always the same.'

Thereupon he took out his pocket-knife, and cut a little notch in the stock of his rifle. 'That 's twenty-three.'

'What—what have you done?' stammered the boy, his face pale with revulsion. 'A fellow creature—who had done you no harm . . .'

'You blessed little fool,' returned the other angrily. 'Any one 'd think you might be a priest. Think they 'd have let you go if you 'd been kind enough to stand up as a target. You 've a lot to learn yet, you have. War 's war—you 'll find that out before long.'

As if to emphasise the words, the look-out man a dozen paces off dropped with a scream, and slithered down into the trench, lay flat, turned over once on his side, then a shiver passed through his limbs, and he lay still.

'That was through the head,' said Nechleba, improving the occasion. 'Takes them differently, you see. Well, that makes us quits, anyway.'

The young apostle who had lately preached the sacredness of human life, grasped his rifle, and fired five shots in rapid succession towards the grey line beyond. His lips moved. 'Scoundrels, murderers, blood-thirsty devils!' he murmured. 'Murderers! . . .'

The greybeard turned on him angrily. 'What are you after, you little fool ? Wasting away ammunition like that ! If the Captain sees you, you 'll catch it.'

The boy leaned back, pale as death, against the earthen wall. His teeth were chattering violently. Just at that moment, the man who had been shot was carried by, the head covered. Nechleba shrugged his shoulders. ' Our turn soon, you never know. It 's all in the day's work. But you 'll never make a soldier, I can see.' He spat on the ground. ' A softy, that 's what you are.'

The boy shook his head. ' Poor blind creatures . . . blind . . .' Then, with a rapid movement, he turned and stood at his post, looking out, with his lips compressed to a thin line.

. . . .

On the seventh day there came a telephone message from battalion headquarters to the effect that the general situation had greatly improved. A big offensive had been commenced by the armies on the flanks ; north and south they were making great progress. The Russians were in retreat there, and it was thus likely that they would also fall back in the centre. And, to crown all, the great fortress had been relieved. The old Major's voice was jubilant as he told the news.

Zillner hastened to cheer up his subordinates with the news. Prager at once set about to celebrate the occasion by a tea party, relying chiefly on his patent meat-tin stove. Andrei danced *czardas* on the floor of the trench, a very creditable performance on the whole, considering the restricted space. Even Spicka made some pretence of cheerfulness, though he expressed himself with all reserve. ' If it really keeps on like that, we may perhaps do something this time after all.'

The men, too, were gleeful and excited, whispering among themselves. ' The Russians have been turned out of Lemberg—that means they 'll have to make peace now. Hurrah for peace ! We 'll be home in time for Christmas after all.'

But Zillner saw the triumphal arch of his dreams rise now more splendid than ever in the east. He saw himself galloping towards it, flags waving all around, the black-and-yellow, the red-and-white, the sacred colours from of old. And thousands of bells were chiming: 'Victory!'

In the dusk of that evening his relief came up. Zillner started as they approached—he could hardly believe his eyes. Here was no other than Hans Heinz Sarapatka, creeping along, his neatly groomed figure bowed in an awkward stoop. 'Here we are,' he gasped, and leaned up against the breastwork. 'What a way! And the night—dark and ugly . . . owls shrieking, as if . . .' There was a whir of bullets over their heads. Hans Heinz ducked. 'As if . . . are they always shooting like this? . . . as if . . . Ugh!'

'Soon get used to it,' said Zillner. 'How long have you been at the front?'

The poet sighed. 'Had to, after all,' he said plaintively. 'Short of officers. As a matter of fact,' he went on, 'I had really been wanting to come and see it all for myself—get at the reality of it, you know. Instead of the wearying routine of office work. Here, of course, it 's different. If only they wouldn't keep firing all the time. It gets on one's nerves, you know.'

Zillner smiled. 'I 'm afraid they don't consider one's nerves overmuch. But you 've only got to keep under cover.'

'I will,' said Hans Heinz earnestly. Then in a dreamy voice, he went on: 'I feel something ripening within . . . a call . . . insistent; it will come, I know. . . .'

'A novel, perhaps. Well, then . . .'

'Novel.' Hans Heinz shook his heavy mane. 'My dear fellow—nothing like it. Novels—no, the men who stay at home can write novels. Little souls, that only think of what they can sell. No—the thing that is burning within me is an epic. The epic of modern war. Here, in the midst of it all, the creative force . . .' A bullet thumped into the earth close by, and spattered his cape. Hans Heinz sat down in the bottom of the trench. 'Really, it 's most uncomfortable—this constant peril of death.' He gulped down something in his throat. 'What was I going to say? Yes; it is in the heroic idealism of action that such a work must be born. A pæan of glorious deeds! If only my nerves. . . . What can the highest inspiration, the most ardent feeling, avail against mere lead? Nothing. They cannot turn a single bullet aside.'

'They can.' Zillner drew himself up to his full height. 'A man inspired with faith in the cause he serves may go through fire and water unscathed.'

Hans Heinz looked at him in astonishment. 'Now you 're talking poetry, my dear fellow. If you care to come round any evening between eight and twelve, when I 'm sitting at the Café Museum—I do my best work then—why, I 'll be as poetic as you please. But here . . . ' He shivered.

'Here is just the place. If I were a poet, I should find my inspiration here—the finest, most glorious songs would be born in just such an hour. Yes, if I were a poet, I would make men feel the ecstasy of joy that comes to a soldier here, where his work lies.'

Hans Heinz flushed angrily. Here was this dull, prosaic fellow, a professional soldier, in a dirty trench, suddenly glowing with poetic fire, while he himself, poet and man of culture, felt only acute discomfort. It was ridiculous!

'Really!' he said aloud. 'My dear fellow, I admire your spirit. You haven't washed for a week, and you can still find all sorts of fantastic ideas and beautiful words. It is really surprising. Now I always shrink from things that make too violent an impression on the mind. All this firing, for instance, and the general sordidness. I don't feel comfortable without my writing-table and my favourite lamp with the rose-pink shade.'

'Is not emotion enough in itself? Must you have a writing-table and a lampshade before you can feel?'

'Well, you know—er—the artistic faculty is never at its best in the midst of chaos. One needs to be removed, at least from the brutally uncongenial. If only the firing would stop, I could grasp the vision of all this hell out here, and set it down in orderly coherence ; create a metric harmony through which gods and devils should work out their strife according to my will ; in a word, produce a work of art direct from nature. You see what I mean ? '

' Not quite.'

' Well, think for a moment. Here we are huddled up in a muddy ditch, with the risk of a bullet through the head at any moment—how can a man construct a plot, or even formulate a single thought in printable guise ? No ; the heart must be cool and calm, the brain clear, and then—then, if you are a true poet, you can dig up jewels from the sorriest mire.'

' I don't know what you understand by a true poet,' objected Zillner. ' Poets like Kleist and Körner, I imagine, must have been of a different clay.'

' Not a bit of it. They felt just the same. I assure you. Do you really suppose Kleist could have written the "*Hermannsschlacht*" sitting in a trench in the Teutoburgerwald ? A nice mess he would have made of it. And as for Körner and his battle songs—if he had kept his ideas in his head till he got home, instead of scribbling them down under fire, they would have been a great deal neater and less rugged. No, it 's no good trying to disparage the critical faculty—it is a part of the poet's equipment. It 's all very well to talk of direct feeling, things written with the heart's blood, and so on. But heart's blood doesn't make a work of art. It is the careful elaboration, the work of the file, that does it. Take a man like Hoffmansthal—you could never make him an Olympian if you tried. He would simply be a dull, unwashed original, with dirty nails, and smelling of cheese. It 's the same here. The sense of the sublime is merely an aftermath, and hero-worship only a literary reaction—I say, I believe I 've caught cold already.' And he sniffed.

Zillner gazed out into the night. ' If it were so,' he said softly, 'I should not care to play a part. Life would be nothing but a senseless play, with a crowd of miserable supers, and one or two well-paid swindlers in the leading parts. No, I shouldn't care to be in that.'

'You misunderstand me.' The poet sniffed again. 'I didn't mean that exactly. An age of great achievements is always a great age; we are in it now, we can feel its breath burning upon us, mark its strides bringing new wonders to light. But if I am to paint its progress, hold up the grandeur of its march to the gaze of generations to come, then I must seek my inspiration in the pathos which only distance can give. In a word, it is impossible to study the war from an æsthetic point of view if it will not leave you in peace—and I am sorely afraid my creative faculty will suffer. The poet must be raised above the actuality of his subject matter, and view it from a distance. That 's what I mean. The war itself, of course . . .'

'Yes, yes, I understand,' interrupted Zillner, his face twitching. 'When it is all over, I can read your epic, and the visions you and your like have grasped with your poetic faculty. Meanwhile, let me introduce you to the vulgar peasant.' And he led the way along the trench, Sarapatka following with an exaggerated stoop. A handshake, and Zillner turned back, followed by his men, along the way to the rear.

The poet crept into the dug-out, drew out a notebook, and endeavoured to set down his thoughts. But there was a disturbing smell of rotten straw, and a constant dripping from the walls. He thrust back his notebook with a sigh, crept into his sleeping-bag, and dreamed of rheumatic fever and swollen joints; followed, it is to be hoped, by medical certificates and honourably acquired unfitness for all further service in the field.

. . . .

Days passed, and still no crossing of the river was effected. The attempt was regularly announced as 'probably to be made to-morrow.' and day after day the reserves paraded in the grey mist of dawn, but only to march back to their second line of defence about eight, and put in the rest of the day at spade work. The clammy fogs crept over the meadows, frost glittered on alder and willow, ice formed on the puddles, and the men found it harder to break the crust of the soil with their short-handled spades. The sun was no longer seen by day, and at night the men crept closer together in their sheds. The straw was damp, and a cold wind whistled through the cracks in the plank walls. The cholera grew bolder, stealing upon the sleepers in the night, and seizing a victim here and there. The doctors went about injecting serum into the rest. The primitive ovens in the village were busy turning out substitutes for the bread that still failed to appear—loaves made from potato flour and brick dust.

Captain Pfustermeyer swore, Colonel Prapora fussed about, scolding and complaining, and the former Brigadier came round from time to time, testing the thickness of the bomb-proof shelters with a foot-rule. Zillner listened to the distant cannonade, which kept on unceasingly. It came from downstream, where the great river flowed out into the greater, and upstream to the south. It was most furious in the region of the recently relieved fortress, where it seemed to have advanced a good deal. Once the airmen reported that the enemy was sending baggage columns northward. This gave rise to pleasant anticipations; evidently the Russians were being forced back by the pressure on their flanks. Then came news from the rear, that bomb-proof stables were under construction at division headquarters—which looked like preparations for the winter, and doing nothing till the spring. . . .

The wearied troops began to grow uneasy. What was going to happen? For three weeks now they had stuck to the same patch of ground, preparing for a leap across the river. The drivers behind flourished their whips, but half-heartedly now, and without fire. If they would only lash out in earnest—a desperate attempt to cross would be better than this inaction. A last charge on the other side: many would fall, no doubt, but then, for the others, a chance of long-needed rest, a prospect of home! Like a harassed beast, the army gathered its limbs for a leap, straining every muscle, waiting for the word. There, on the farther bank, was peace to be won. Peace! One more leap, and perhaps another, and it would be over. But the signal did not come. There came instead a night of terror—a night that tore the hearts of men to shreds. . . .

It was three o'clock. Zillner was sitting in his quarters, reading a letter from Baroness Lisl at Meran. '. . . He is getting on slowly, so slowly. Still the cough and the fever. I am worn out, and dreadfully anxious about him . . . and please do not write about the war this time, please. . . .'

Zillner stared at the flickering candle flame. Poor old Krottenburg! A good fellow—it was hard luck indeed. Thrown away by a senseless order, and left there now at the rear in idleness . . . cough and fever . . . poor Lisl! He folded up the letter. What could he say to comfort her? His world here was so far removed from hers; her world that held but one thing—the wounded man for whom she lived. His thoughts and dreams were hopelessly alien to her one sorrow; how could he find words that should help her? Tell her of his faith, that looked forth over the manifold death into a glory of flowers? Impossible! She was a loving woman, with no heart for anything beyond her own nest, that the war had already all but wrecked. This great and merciless thing—war; how should she ever understand? She would hate him if he tried. How could she feel otherwise?

He felt as if something in his heart had withered. He had grown poorer, or surely he could have found words to comfort a suffering woman who asked for his aid. His heart had grown speechless, and it frightened him. Even his men, the poor simple soldiers who looked up to him—if they fell, he would see the pity of it, but his heart would still be dumb. No—he had ceased to be a human being; he was a soldier and nothing more. He stared at the light, and it seemed as if he were straining to follow a blood-red star, the only one in all the sky for him. All the kindlier little lights that had warmed and cheered him before had faded in that fire, a single blood-red glow that filled the sky. And his eyes were drawn to it, and his heart beat wildly in longing. . . . What could poor Lisl say if he should try to comfort her by telling of his star? He could see her face shrink with horror, hear her voice, 'No, no, why do you tell me of those horrible fancies? Tell me when Moritz will be well again. Tell me if he will be well soon—well again . . .'

Zillner racked his brain to find something he could write. What could a man say to her? . . . It was no good. Perhaps to-morrow. . . . He lay down on the floor, where little Andrei was snoring in the straw. Then there came a knock at the door.

An orderly stepped in, and gave out breathlessly: 'Order from the Colonel. Rouse the men, and form up read to march. Captain Zillner to the office at once.'

'What does it mean? Are we going to cross?'

The man could tell him nothing save that the Colonel seemed much disturbed. Zillner buckled on his sword, took his cap and hurried off through the darkness.

The regiment had set up its headquarters in a large farmhouse. The anteroom was full of orderlies and motor cyclists; in the next apartment sat the Adjutant, surrounded by a staff of clerks. His face was haggard from want of sleep, and he was plainly nervous, as he sat with the telephone receiver to his ear, scribbling in a big notebook. A couple of oil lamps hung from the roof, shedding a dismal light. The Colonel was striding up and down impatiently. Zillner saluted.

'Ah, yes,' said the Colonel. 'You have your men ready? Good. The position is this . . .' He walked up and down with rapid steps, looking like a caged lion startled by a display of fireworks. 'The position, my dear fellow . . . well . . .' The Colonel's voice was firm, yet with a certain ingratiating tone, which he was wont to adopt in dealing with awkward situations. ‘In a word . . . you are to hold the position here until the regiment has reached a place of safety.’

Zillner stepped back in astonishment. ‘The regiment. . . . Pardon, sir—I don’t quite . . . ’

‘Well, you see, it ’s like this.’ The Colonel paused, and looked about him. ‘We are to fall back. The whole division. It ’s altogether unexpected, I know . . . still, as it is . . . ’

He resumed his march up and down, under the lamps. Suddenly he stopped, and shouted across to the Adjutant. ‘Well, sir, get along, if you please. This cursed dawdling. Send out the order once more, and let us get done with it.’

Poor Captain Würkner lifted his office-wearied eyes appealingly: ‘Sir, the Brigadier has just altered the arrangements for the fifth time. The Adjutant says he can’t help it, the division headquarters . . . ’

‘Good heavens—what are they all about? Delay, delay . . . and here are we trying to get the work through.’ The Colonel spread his arms wide in the attitude of one crucified. Then, turning to the clerks, who were cowering like scared fowls in a thunderstorm, he shouted at them: ‘Paper—pencils, lazy devils that you are! Come along.’ He grasped a stout corporal by the arm and shook him. ‘Make haste, you drivelling lump of lard, or I ’ll . . . ’ And Colonel Prapora tore off his cape, waved it furiously about his head, and flung it down on the floor.

A little Jew clerk crept under the table and picked it up; the Colonel took it without a word, and put it on again. ‘Ah . . . at last!’ The Adjutant was ready with the orders at last, and gave them out now to the telephone, in a clear, even voice, while the clerks wrote down at the same time. ‘. . . Front line companies to evacuate their positions at once. Small patrols will be left behind to deceive the enemy, but will likewise be withdrawn as soon as light. . . . Battalions will occupy second line of defence . . . First battalion to cover the retreat—occupy the outskirts of the village, and hold the position at any cost. First order, dated twelve midnight.'

Zillner was still standing by the door. The orders fell on his ear like blows; he was in a torment of anger and disappointment. The stuffy little room, with its smoky lamps, the pale face of the Adjutant in his corner, the Colonel swinging up and down like a pendulum, in a cloud of cigarette smoke . . . was it all real, or only something in a dream. Impossible! . . . impossible! . . .

The Colonel's voice called him harshly from his trance.

'Still there, Captain Zillner? Well, sir, my orders were surely clear enough. To your post at once, if you please. The enemy may be moving out at any moment to follow. . . . Heaven help us! At once, sir.' Then, changing his tone, he went on appealingly: 'My dear fellow, I know I can trust you. . . . It is a post of the utmost importance . . . for the honour of the regiment . . . hold it at any cost. You understand?'

Zillner went out. Over on the northern fringe of the village were the newly-dug trenches, showing grey in the dark of the night. He stood there, staring at the grey wall, behind which the river flowed slowly on. A dull sound of musketry reached his ears—he had heard it now for nearly a month. He thought of the grimy fellows huddled up in their pitiful shelters, comforting themselves with the sweet word, 'Peace.' Like a trumpet call from the sky had come the promise: they had but to drive out the enemy, and peace was theirs. And now, the telephone shouting harshly across their dreams—the order to retreat! Again retreat! And the Christmas trees of their vision turned to ugly spectres.

. . . Out there in front thousands of poor wretches dragged back their rifles and flung their hopes away, to be driven themselves like fallen leaves before the wind. . . .

What use had it all been? A terrible voice rang through Zillner's soul, bidding him curse that 'Faith' of his. In a passion of loathing he flung himself down on the wet ground, and lay there digging his fingers deep into the sand. 'Curses on your faith!' he hissed between his teeth.

Spidery fingers clutched at him out of the night, and an awesome whispering and muttering sounded in his ears. 'Credulous fool! Where is your rainbow now? Look about you, and throw off the scales from your eyes. They are to die in vain, as the others have died . . . all those out in the dank meadows, in the trenches, in the furrows of the plough . . . all of them, all! The sounding words and phrases, the orders lashed out like a whip—all lies, all lies! The men at the rear, they have long since ceased to believe. They drift about, and stammer out commands at hazard. Their show of energy is only a part they play, their seeming confidence a sham . . . the most they hope for now is to bring the pitiful tragedy to a less pitiful close, and it is for that we are being sacrificed. We are to die, that they may say it might have been worse after all. Credulous fool!—with your heart full of pity for the little supers in the play, what corner of your soul is still so blind? How can you still believe?'

His slight frame was shaking as with ague. Something was roaring in his ear: 'Curses on your heart! They are to die in vain, as the rest have died.' He murmured the words himself, and the voices ceased. Then another whisper rose: 'Are you a soldier?—are you your father's son? He died in action, and did not ask if he had died in vain. Are you a soldier—as your father and his fathers before him? Those men, who rendered honourable service, generation after generation, in the Habsburg armies—can you turn and curse the faith in which they lived and died? They were faithful to the death—and you? Shame on you, that you have forsaken their ways. You, a soldier!' But the voice from the night cried out: 'A human being is something greater than a soldier; the greatest thing a man can be. Be that!'

Zillner staggered back to his company, his head in a fever. Ten minutes later, as he was taking up his position, a motor cyclist came up: 'Orders from the Colonel—the position to be evacuated, and the company to join up with the regiment at once. The retirement to be carried out without delay.'

It was the sixth change of plans.

CHAPTER XII

THAT night the grey columns toiled back over vile roads, cut deep by heavy wheels, and frozen hard. Dark forests towered threateningly on either side; the villages were shivering skeletons, desolately, dreadfully silent, with unlit windows glowering like dead eyes, and houses standing resignedly in their wreckage, as if knowing that no worse could come to them now than what had been. Twice the war had passed that way, trampling down everything underfoot, crushing in roofs and piercing the walls to sieves. Its third coming could not move them; they were patient now, and could look tamely upon death.

Many a hope that had flourished greenly in the mire and damp by the river died out that night. Men did not speak of it—they marched on, hundreds of thousands of them, sullen at heart as the sullen night about them. But one thought was tearing at the soul of all, agonising every step; why—why? Why all that bloodshed on the river bank? Why all those pits full of corpses on the fringe of the wood, by the streams, on the hillsides and scattered about the fields? In each man's soul a sullen anger was at work; anger at this thing they could not understand. But the night was long, and as the columns groped on through the endlessness of it all, the thought grew sluggish and dull. Hunger, with a physical craving to huddle up somewhere and sleep, was stronger than all the doubt and questioning of the mind. Food and sleep—that was the pressing need; the one idea that stood out clearly still. All else seemed insignificant. And after a march of forty kilometres without halt, a fair glow of light rose over the wearily struggling thousands: the dawn!

The first battalion of the Tiefenbachers had a division of heavy howitzers wedged into their formation. The giant guns creaked awkwardly along through the deep ruts, the horses straining and gasping. They were big, powerfully built animals, but terribly weak from lack of food. At every little rise, a gun or an ammunition waggon stuck fast, and had to be got under way again with shouts and cracking of whips and pushing at the spokes. When all proved unavailing, the ammunition was taken out and buried. And at every such check, Major Blagorski would look on with a dismal face and plaintively protest: ‘Now if the Russians were to attack at this moment—really, gentlemen—how are we to get on at all? We shall be left behind, that will be the end.’ He looked like a corpse, and stared out anxiously to front and rear, for a sight of the Colonel.

‘I hardly think they’ll come up in pursuit,’ said Grill. ‘A forced march like this should give us a good start, and throw them out.’

‘Heaven grant it may,’ sighed the Major.

It was full daylight now. The Tiefenbachers left the road, and made their way up a steep hill, where they at once commenced to prepare a position of defence. The artillery clattered in to a neighbouring village; the horses needed rest. Colonel Prapora stalked about shouting orders: ‘Not too wide—no time to spare. Breastworks thrown well up, sharp lines, if you please. Hurry along there—the enemy may be here at any minute. . . .’ Then off he went to the village with a detachment of pioneers, to see about a bomb-proof shelter for himself, where he could get a few hours’ rest.

Zillner sat down by a field path. He was in a fever. As through a veil he saw his men swaying hither and thither over the ground, heard his lieutenants giving orders as they marked out the lines of the trenches. His mind was a blank; no thought, no feeling, no voice —he sat there shivering. And this was war! . . . the great and beautiful power! . . . A power, rather, that turned men to dull beasts. He strove to collect his thoughts, to recall the events of the night. Nothing but marching, tramp, tramp, and he himself riding behind his men. Once his horse had stumbled and all but thrown him—the poor beast was nearly worn out. What had happened before that? . . . He had been unhappy about something . . . never mind—it was all ridiculous, not worth a thought. It dawned upon him that he must be ill. Should he ask the doctor? No, it was nothing; he was tired, nothing more. Up, and get to work again!

He pulled himself together with an effort, and went over to where the men were working. Then he sat down again, overcome with weariness, and sank into a blessed half-consciousness. He sat staring at a rich dark clump of upturned soil, thinking of nothing, nothing. . . .

Pfustermeyer's voice roused him. 'Wake up, man. It 's no good sitting moping about it all, like a bottle-green when his blessed little plans go wrong. I say, though, you 're looking pretty bad. A nip of brandy 's the thing. Crlenjak has some *slivovitza*,[1] I know. Or hot tea with a dash of rum. We 've got the samovar going over there. Come along.' He took Zillner's arm, and led him away. 'We 'll soon get some warmth into you.'

Pfustermeyer's section was at breakfast. The little Croat had still a few drops of *slivovitza*, and some bread and sausage; Grill brought out sardines, and Pfustermeyer had provided tea. The messmen set out plates and cups, and the officers sat down.

'What puzzles me,' began Grill, scowling at the mud on his boots, 'is the suddenness of it all. We were getting on nicely, all things considered, and the beggars had begun to pluck up courage. And then—retire! I can't make it out myself.'

'Don't try,' said Pfustermeyer. 'What 's the good? We go the way we 're fated to go—all the puzzling in the world won't make it shorter, or longer either—only harder. I 've given up worrying about things long ago.

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[1] A kind of spirit made from plums.

And if I do happen to get in a rage once in a while, when the high and mighty ones have been more than usually exasperating, why, I laugh at myself for it afterwards, and think of something else instead—home, for instance, and the old lady and the youngsters, and what fun it 'll be when it 's all over.'

Grill's hard face softened into a faint smile. 'I wish I could take things as philosophically as you. When I can't understand a thing, I can't help trying to find some explanation, at any rate. To-day, for instance . . . '

'Well, it must mean something,' said the big man complacently, stuffing a hunch of bread into his mouth. 'A new reconstruction, I suppose they 'd call it. Something wrong with the old arrangement somewhere, so they 've got to alter it. Anyhow, we 're still alive, that 's the principal thing. Jovo, is there a drop left ? '

The withered mannikin handed him the bottle. 'Here, brother, maybe you can find a drop. Yes, you 're right—it 's no good worrying—though I don't know, I 'm sure. . . .' The little man seemed older than ever to-day, his face all wrinkled and furrowed, and with the grey stubble thick on his unshaven chin, but his eyes twinkled merrily. 'The night wasn't so bad, after all. Dry frost, brother—I can stand any amount of that. It 's the damp that brings out my wretched gout. I 'm fit enough to-day, though I 'm not so young as I was.'

'Bravo,' cried Pfustermeyer. 'That 's the way to take it. Jovo, you 're a first-rate sort—I 'd drink your health if there was anything left to drink. Here '—he turned to Zillner—' here 's a man now, that 's simply worrying himself to death with thinking about the blessed retreat. Feeling better—what ? '

'Thanks,' said the young Captain, with a faint smile. It hurt him to feel himself so far removed from the rest. Why could he not take things as Pfustermeyer did, with a grand equanimity proof against all the trials of these miserable days ; or as that brave-hearted little greybeard there ; or like Grill, who was simply annoyed at having to call his men back when he would have preferred to drive them on with the whip—that was the way a soldier ought to look at things. While he—he could not help feeling miserable; it pained him. He was at feud with himself, a romantic dreamer, yet none the less a critic, sceptic . . . and so his dreams always ended at last in the recognition of some bitter truth.

Pfustermeyer must have guessed something of his trouble, for he cried out suddenly, 'Now, gentlemen, I'll give you a recipe to keep up your spirits. And you, melancholy spectre, you in particular. Well then, first of all, we imagine the Colonel well out of the way. Then we count up the days—the third of November—*ergo*, ninety days nearer peace—that's encouraging in itself. Then we proceed to think of something we're specially keen on—Grill, for instance, of his promotion, and a decoration of some sort into the bargain; the younger bloods can think of their sweethearts, and so forth. I, for my part, think of a neat little house I've got out in Waidhofen, with a trout stream close by, and noisy youngsters rioting about, and old people cosily at ease. Once you get used to keeping your thoughts on that sort of thing, you won't worry any more about obstreperous colonels or forced marches, or any other silly devilments of war.'

'That's all very well, brother,' put in the little Croat, 'but there's one thing you've forgotten. What about the victory? That's what I'm thinking about most of the time. And when's that coming along?'

'Oh, well, it's a matter of taste,' said Pfustermeyer. 'I find it more interesting myself to think of a quiet comfortable life when it's all over. All that about victory—it simply makes me think of diplomatic dodges and our blessed politicians, and all the mess they've landed us in already. And that's not a cheerful subject to dwell upon. I've had a little experience of my own with the bottle-greens—and that brings it all up again. Anyhow, we needn't talk of that—maybe we shall win after all. I only mean it's a bit too early yet to think of it, or so it seems to me. It 's a matter of taste, of course.'

'Well, I don't know about that,' protested the little man eagerly. 'Surely we must beat them—there can be no question of that.'

'Let 's hope we may, let 's hope we may,' grumbled Pfustermeyer. Then all at once his jolly red face assumed an air of comical dismay. 'O Lord! here comes the poet!'

Hans Heinz held out a limp hand to each in turn. He was not looking his best. The lower part of his Roman countenance was wrapped up in a woollen scarf, the upper portion covered with a fur cap, and the collar of his cloak turned up about his ears. Only his finely chiselled nose stood out unprotected. It seemed to be blushing and shedding tears of shame into the handkerchief that Sarapatka held beneath it. 'Give me a piece of chocolate, if there is any,' he said thickly. 'Not hungry—only an abominable looseness of the bowels—though I 've eaten three cakes already. It was all I had.'

Pfustermeyer nodded sympathetically, and fished up a cake of chocolate from his pocket. 'I thought perhaps it worked as a sort of inspiration, like Schiller's rotten pears.'

'Apples, apples!' corrected the poet impatiently. Then with a hollow laugh: 'Inspiration—Ugh! I have not a notion in my head; not so much as the shadow of an idea. Only that cursed noise of firing from the trenches. Tired, I'm tired!' He sighed deeply, and sat down.

'Ah!' said Grill, with feigned sympathy, 'that 's the first stage. Persistent hallucinations—one of the worst symptoms of general breakdown. You 've got it badly, I 'm afraid.'

The poet looked up with a sudden gleam in his eyes, and his voice had a brighter ring. 'You think it 's that? Well, gentlemen, I don't mind telling you, I 've been suffering tortures of late. I hope you may never feel the same. Hot and cold, burning and shivering by turns, teeth chattering all the time, and my right side seemed paralysed. And a constant noise in the ears, with fits of giddiness at times, till I can hardly sit in the saddle. And rings of light, green and red and blue, dancing before one's eyes, whirling about at a furious pace . . . and my tongue . . .'

'All thick and furred . . . yes, you needn't tell us.' Pfustermeyer shook his head gravely. 'It 's plain enough. Neurasthenia and rheumatism, that 's what 's the matter with you. There 's only one cure for it, and that 's a good sharp little bout of hand-to-hand fighting —it 's the only thing. You 'll see, it 'll work wonders.'

'Fighting!' The poet stared aghast. 'Man, you 're not serious! Rest—a thorough rest, is the only cure for shattered nerves and general breakdown. My constitution . . . why, even my bowels are all wrong—a most disgusting complaint . . . have to fall out a dozen times a day, and—er—in the open, you know, like a beast of the field . . . it 's unendurable. I hope you may never feel as bad as I do at this moment. . . .'

'No, no,' said Pfustermeyer sturdily, 'it 's not as hopeless as you think. Once we 're attacked, and you find yourself in the thick of it, you 'll feel a different man. No more paralysis, no more coloured pictures dancing, no more—er—falling out like a beast of the field—you wait and see.' He looked at his watch. 'Close on twelve o'clock. They 'll be coming up with us at any minute now.'

The poet rose hurriedly to his feet. 'What—you think . . . to-day . . . already . . . ?'

'Why, of course. What else do you think we 've been digging these pretty little ditches for?'

'I thought it was just the usual precaution . . . and —we 've been marching all night. Surely the Russians can't . . .'

'That shows how much you know about them. Haven't you noticed that they generally do attack about noon?'

Sarapatka's nose paled at the tip. 'I think—I 'd better see how the men are getting on,' he said. 'Perhaps . . . ' And the poet walked away, his shoulders drooping, a miserable figure.

The burly captain watched his retreating form with a smile. 'Nice sort of soldier that!—what? Tickled him up a bit, I fancy.'

'Extraordinary,' said Grill in his sharp voice. 'And that is the man who talked of war like a prophet inspired—in the days of peace! Jesting apart, though, will there be anything doing to-day?'

'Of course not,' growled Pfustermeyer. 'Did you ever know the Russians attack a good position properly defended? I 've never seen them. It 's only to keep us awake. Here 's the Colonel and the Major coming up. I don't mind betting we 're ordered to march on again within the hour.'

The Colonel inspected the defences, and found them fairly satisfactory, all things considered. And about one o'clock there came a whip-lash of command from division headquarters: The retirement to be pushed on without delay. The whole long front of covered trenches which had cost the wearied men four hours of hard work, was left behind, and the grey columns, staggering from want of sleep, trailed forward into the grey of the afternoon.

Possibly the Russians may have been taken aback at the sudden and inexplicable move. At any rate, they attempted no pursuit at first, but contented themselves with taking possession of the huge stores of material that had been left behind at the river.

. . . .

Cossack batteries were spattering the rearguard with shrapnel, firing more or less at hazard; the shells whined dismally under the morning sky. The little bursting clouds could be seen far off; the Cossacks seemed to have taken the whole dome of heaven for a target. It was the custom to make a jest of the thing: the men had always done so up to now, jeering at the fools who were trying to shoot holes in the blue up above, and urging them facetiously to try again. But to-day it was different. Anxious eyes peered out in the direction whence the firing came in irregular rolls of thunder; there was a strange silence in the ranks, and the men stepped out with a longer stride. A little nervous shiver seemed to run through the companies from time to time. With shoulders forward, and backs more bent than was their wont, they hurried on; in many faces one could plainly read the wish to run. Run—off into the cover of the woods. Many eyes were dull with the sense of hopelessness: all they had done up to now was fruitless; however they toiled and fought, the end was always the same—retreat. Bitter little thoughts were hammering at men's brains, as if gasping in time to their rapid breathless pace. 'Had enough—enough, enough!' 'Push on and get out of it—out of it—out of it!' It had been a sorry feast—and it was they who had to pay the piper. On—on! And the pace grew quicker.

The captains rode beside their companies, watchful as men guarding untamed beasts. The subalterns, too, kept a close eye on their men; they could see the spectre of fear hovering about the ranks. It was a time for the sternest discipline, or the compact mass that was wont to trudge like a simple, willing beast, might break at any moment into a thousand desperate units, rushing in headlong senseless flight to anywhere. They hurry on in ever growing dread of the devils at their heels. The officers' pistols are helpless to cope with the threatening panic; at any moment it may burst on them like a hurricane, tearing the whole formation into shreds.

Grill's revolver is hot in his fingers; three of his men had dashed for the bushes as the shrapnels burst over their heads, and he had shot them down as a warning to the others. And riding slowly round he shepherds the rest of his company with silent, terrible eyes. They march on, faultlessly in step, keeping their dressing minutely, answering to the stronger will.

* * * * * * *

The Cossack batteries had done no damage, and after a while the firing ceased. The troops marched on.

'Funny thing,' said Pfustermeyer to Zillner. 'Deuced funny thing. Plucky as anything up to now, even under the hottest fire. And now—all of a sudden, their nerve goes. And all for those rotten little shrapnels. They never bothered about them before.'

Zillner made no answer. He seemed to see the heavens full of flaming signs: Woe unto those who had thrown away the lives of men—the blood of that wasted sacrifice should be upon their head. He felt inwardly exhausted, and a great despair was at his heart.

'Look at that lieutenant of yours,' went on the big man, lowering his voice. 'Never known him look so cheerful before. Might think he was pleased to be going the wrong way.'

'Yes,' agreed Zillner bitterly. 'He 's an Austrian to be proud of, indeed!'

Lieutenant Spicka, the Czech, was certainly looking pleased. He walked at the rear of his men, with his head in the air, and a smile of mischievous enjoyment on his lips. He seemed to be occupied with agreeable thoughts; from time to time, he bowed his head, as if to conceal a gleam of crafty satisfaction in his eyes. Then up again, and staring at the knapsacks of the men in front of him. He told his thoughts to none: it was not his way to confide in people, least of all Germans and Hungarians; he kept his secret proudly locked in his own Slav heart. Things were going badly with his German friends—*Nazdar!* That was the main thing, and enough for the present. Mother Russia would soon arrange the rest. . . . For Spicka, the retreat was a triumphal march.

. . . .

About noon, the Tiefenbachers halted and dug themselves in. The Colonel called his officers together, and explained to them with kindly intent, if somewhat nervously, how entirely innocuous a thing was a shrapnel shell. Musketry fire could be dangerous at times, but to lose one's nerve for a little shrapnel was simply ridiculous! It made a noise, and that was positively all. They would do well to make this clear to the men. 'We must keep up our strength, gentlemen. It is not unlikely that we may this very day . . . the enemy is not far off, I understand.' The Colonel concluded his lecture with genial warmth, and took himself off to his bomb-proof shelter.

'All sugar and spice to-day, the old man,' said Pfustermeyer to Sarapatka. And with a chuckle, he added, 'We shall be in the thick of it to-day, you see.'

'It 'll have to come some day, I suppose,' said the poet, striving to appear resigned to his fate.

'If I were you, now, I 'd sit down and work out a neat little "Hymn before Action"—do you good, you know, to collect your thoughts.'

'Do not jest, I beg of you,' murmured Hans Heinz. 'If you knew what I feel at this moment. . . . The whole of my left side is simply dead. . . . I 'm done for, I 'm afraid.'

'Get out!' laughed the other. 'All nonsense. A fine fellow like you!'

'A vulgar fellow,' thought Hans Heinz to himself, 'with his tactless witticisms. He annoys me.' And he resolved to take the earliest opportunity of telling him so.

But the opportunity never came. That day the Russians attacked, half-heartedly, as usual, but in overpowering numbers, and the burly captain met his fate. The first volleys, fired at long range, came singing over the trenches; Pfustermeyer was standing upright, calmly on the look-out. A sudden shiver passed through his huge frame, and he fell in a heap.

They dragged him carefully down under cover. 'Where are you hit, sir?' asked the orderly corporal, fumbling at his tunic.

'Don't bother,' murmured the big man in a voice unlike his own. 'It 's no good. Through the stomach. All over now.'

He unfastened his tunic with difficulty, drew out a leather wallet, and whispered : ‘ Captain Zillner—ask him to come a moment.’ The jovial round face was drawn and grey.

Zillner came running up, and knelt beside him, ‘ Pfustermeyer, my dear old friend—you ’re not—you mustn’t . . .’

The dying man drew from his wallet a bundle of notes. ‘ Here—company funds. Two thousand five hundred and thirty-five Kronen . . . should be . . . twenty-three hundred, rest in twenties, and one ten—count.’

‘ Don’t, man, don’t ! . . .’ Zillner grasped his friend’s hand ; he felt the tears choking him. ‘ My good old friend. . . .’ He could say no more.

The big man smiled faintly. ‘ Officers proceeding on furlough,’ he quoted, ‘ . . . hand . . . company funds ’ . . . He gasped ; there was hardly the breath of a child in all his body. ‘ My wife—tell her . . . Tiefenbachers, good luck. . . .’ His voice was stifled in a throbbing gasp, and a moment later Zillner closed the eyes that had smiled so bravely all along.

A soldier’s requiem sang through the air, an organ music from thousands of hellish tubes that shrieked and whined.

The big man lay contentedly, imperturbable as ever, unmoved by the furious din ; his face was calm, as if he knew that nothing could harm him now.

The whisper ran from man to man along the trench. ‘ The Captain ’s down,’ and many hearts winced in pain. His servants and the orderly knelt beside him, with tears in their eyes—he had been kind to them.

Zillner, with head erect, strode back across the bullet-spattered ground to his company. There had come upon him a strange and thrilling sense of companionship with death, now that he had lost his dearest friend. What was there to wait for ? What joy could it be to him now to drag on through the rest of the campaign, with his faith gone and his soul dulled ? Men sluggish by nature could live so, and sturdier minds could make light of it all. But for him, it was at an end. A bitter loathing seized him—the senseless waste—the madness—that human beings could give themselves up to this. Death—death was the only sane thing left in an insane world. It made an end; one could forget, and it meant peace—peace such as his old comrade there had won—and, perhaps, meet those who had gone . . . perhaps, after all, the soul was not a mere invention of the cheating priests. He longed to taste the truth of life; to die.

The men looked curiously at him as he walked down the line, with head and body exposed. But not a bullet touched him. Fate is generous of the gifts we do not ask, and miserly with those we beg for . . . ay, and scornfully cruel when we seek to extort some favour by defiance. And Zillner's fate laughed at him now. Not this time—no, not yet. Let him run a little longer.

. . . .

The Tiefenbachers held out until the evening, and then relinquished their rearguard position in the face of an overpowering enemy force. Zillner sprang out from cover, and sounded his whistle: 'Cease fire! Retire!'

Figures of men glided out from the shadow of the trenches, and moved back into the misty dark behind. Zillner glanced to the left, where Spicka lay with his men—no one moved. He shouted across: 'Lieutenant Spicka—retire!' A few men emerged—surely that could not be all? 'Lieutenant Spicka—retire! Do you hear me? Fall back at once!' roared Zillner again.

Then a dark mass of moving figures flowed over the breastwork of the trench from the front, and there was the sound of a faint 'Hurrah.' Above it rose a single voice—Zillner's heart-beat checked as he heard it—Spicka's voice, in loud entreaty: '*Mi sme bratri, niec strilat!*'[1] And like an echo came the cry from the miserable wretches in the trench, a wailing '*Niec strilat!*' There was no further attempt to retire.

Zillner felt as if he had been beaten with a stick. Spicka's men had thrown down their rifles, and flung up their arms as the Russians came in, begging piteously for quarter: '*Mi sme bratri!*'—Cowards! It was very quiet there now. The men—his men—were fraternising with the Russians. A sob burst from him. This was the meaning of that triumphant smile on the face of the Czech; this was what he had been looking forward to through all those weary days. And now he had got his wish.

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[1] We are brothers—do not fire!

Zillner's fingers gripped his pistol fiercely. If he could reach him now!

Behind, in the enemy's ranks, Spicka was already on his way to a safe and pleasant captivity among his Slav brothers.

. . . .

The Tiefenbachers fell back under a desultory fire from the enemy, and were soon under cover of the dark. They were already practically out of range, and Zillner was in the act of forming up his men, who were straggling a little, when something struck his left shoulder heavily. He felt but little pain, and gave no particular heed to what had happened, but after a few steps a sudden faintness seized him. He clenched his teeth and staggered on a little—then his knees gave way and he sank down unconscious.

. . . .

At the dressing station he came to, and the first thing he perceived was the glow of a cigar close above his head. A surgeon with a red moustache was bending over him. 'H'm—perforation of the shoulder-blade. Nothing serious. A bit lower down would have been awkward. Next.'

Zillner looked round, vaguely wondering. He was lying in some straw on the floor of a big room; there were a number of wounded about. The voice of the surgeon seemed trampling, as it were, on the constant low moaning that went up from every side.

'Get the bad cases out in the passage. That'll give us more room. Abdominal wounds can stay here for the present. How many abdominals are there?'

'Nine, sir,' reported an assistant.

'Leave them alone as long as you can—and outside as soon as . . . you understand. We must have room.'

A rough kind of lantern threw a cone of faint light down through the close air, leaving most of the place half dark. A staff of men in white overalls were moving about. From somewhere by the wall came a fluttering prayer: 'Can't you help me, please . . . the bandage is soaked with blood, and all my clothes . . . the pain 's awful. . . .' The little red glow of the cigar came to a halt. . . . 'You, is it? Pain awful—yes, I know. The bandage is all right, my man, you 've nothing to complain of. Pain? Can't help you, I 'm afraid. We 're not here to work miracles. Next.' And the red cigar-point moved on. 'Any knife work that can't wait? No—all right then. We can leave things as they are for a bit. How are things outside, by the way?'

A corporal reported that there were rumours of enemy forces close at hand.

The red spot ducked and quivered a little. 'Oh—h'm. In that case—we must get away from here. Have the carts ready at once. Keep four for the doctors—take the slightly wounded in the others, if there 's room. The rest must stay here. Come along, gentlemen, no time to lose.'

The red glow swept like a meteor down the wall and vanished.

Zillner soon noticed that only the badly wounded men were left. Here and there he could hear one choking in the death struggle; a man on his right gave a great gasp and lay still. The Russians were coming—he would be taken prisoner . . . no, anything rather than that. He raised himself to a sitting posture, found he could sit up without pain, and attempted to rise. He managed to stand on his feet, though the room seemed swaying about him. He must get out to the carts—he would manage somehow.

Outside all was confusion and shouting. Vehicles drove up and moved off. An assistant surgeon came rushing in and gave a hurried glance round. 'We are moving off from here—they are firing on the outskirts of the village already, and we must give up the place. Those who can walk, come along at once—the others remain quietly where they are.'

Zillner pulled himself together, and stumbled towards the doctor. 'Lend me a hand, would you mind? I can manage if you 'll just hold my arm.'

Ambulance men hurried by with bundles of groaning humanity. Two men with their heads swathed up, till they looked like bales of cotton, came hobbling along by themselves. On every side were others crying piteously to be taken in the carts.

'Very sorry—can't take any more,' called out the surgeon, with a shrug of the shoulders. 'Hardly room for us as it is. Hurry up there—hurry up!'

The carts were ordinary peasant waggons from the neighbourhood. Four of them were occupied by the doctors, two to each cart.

The youngest of the surgeons remained behind at the dressing station. Three men, badly wounded in the legs, were placed in the fifth cart, which was slightly larger than the rest. Zillner and the two head-swathed men sat on board seats above the prostrate three, and they drove off. The little country ponies were urged to the top of their speed; the badly wounded men on the floor of the cart cried out terribly at first, but soon lost consciousness. Zillner was suffering agony; he bit his lip till the blood came, and hung on desperately with his one sound arm to the board seat; every bump and shake of the springless axles went through his body. The two on the opposite seat held each other's arms for support, their bound heads rocking like grey globes in the dark. Thus the remainder of what had been a dressing station rattled on into the night. As soon as they reached the high road, and were once more on ground held by their own troops, the pace slackened; the sense of safety made itself felt; men found their voices, and were no longer oblivious of their comrades. They looked at one another, and exchanged sympathetic inquiries. Even those who had been shaken almost to death found strength to smile, despite their shattered bones. And, lying down on the benches in the waiting-room, they could dream that all their miseries were at an end ; could give themselves up to longing thoughts of home, and look forward to some dear embrace. Already they could hear the rumble of the hospital train approaching.

Zillner sat in a corner, shaking with fever, and staring blankly at a coloured poster advertising travel tickets. Suddenly his *vis-à-vis* from the terrible waggon ride leaned over towards him, muttering thickly through his bandages : ‘ There ! What do you think of that ? I ’ve always said war was a filthy business, but there ’s no need to make it worse by lying—more especially when the liars are men whom everybody trusts. Read that.’

He handed a paper across—it was a copy of a provincial daily. Zillner read : ‘ Official.—The General Staff reports : The position is in all essentials unchanged.’

‘ Unchanged. I wonder what they call “ essential ”.’

Zillner shrugged his shoulders. ‘ I suppose they deceive themselves as well as others. After all, don’t we do the same—or did till a while back ? You, I suppose, came into the thing with all sorts of ideals, and haven’t you had to shut your eyes to the truth pretty often since ? We ’ve all done it—hundreds of times ! Again and again, till the mind breaks down, and leaves us miserable slaves, without an atom of soldierly spirit. And yet—think of the time when we were still soldiers at heart—didn’t the lie seem a better thing than the truth as we know it now ? ’

The swathed head rocked to and fro, but gave no answer. The train came into the station, there was a creaking of brakes, a hiss and sputter from the engine, and it drew up. A man came hurrying along the platform, his cheeks red with the cold, his eyes bright with excitement. It was Hans Heinz, the poet. He shouted breathlessly and hurriedly as he came up. ‘Thank heaven, I ’ve found you again! I was afraid I should miss the train. We ’ve been galloping all the way like mad. It was terrible, terrible!’

‘Are you wounded?’ asked Zillner.

‘Worse than that,’ said the poet, his lips quivering in an appeal for sympathy. ‘Shaken to death. My head—it ’s simply agony.’

Despite his plaints, it was evident that the prince of poets was very much alive; more so, indeed, than he had seemed for a long time. He carried his head high, with the air of a Cæsar triumphant, his eyes beamed with a sunshine of delight at the kindly fate that had granted him leave to pursue his studies of the mysteries of life in peace.

The cotton bale nodded towards the train, and gurgled out happily: ‘That means home! Home—and live like a human being again—and feel. . . . Home, the wife and the little ones. . . . Oh, it ’s grand, it ’s grand!’

Zillner said no word.

CHAPTER XIII

There was certainly a great deal of excitement. Fräulein Erika, the assistant nurse, sprang down the stairs, her black skirts flying behind her. She came to a halt at the bottom, holding her side, and cried out, ‘ They ’ll be here in a minute. They ’ve just telephoned from the station. Twenty-five of them to us—think, twenty-five wounded heroes ! ’

The Sisters looked out over the park to the drive—the hospital had until recently been a palace.

‘ Froschi, my dear, pray do not excite yourself so,’ said one of them, an older woman, whose thin face seemed impregnated with the bitterness of hard-won resignation. ‘ Really, one might think you were a child. Are you expecting some one you know—an old acquaintance perhaps ? ’

‘ No, of course not. But really, it is exciting—and I hope I ’m not too old to show it.’ Fräulein Erika tossed her head, showing a wealth of brown hair under the white cap. ‘ I think it ’s lovely ! ’

‘ Lovely—H’m—not always,’ put in a fair, broad-bosomed girl with a little *retroussé* nose. ‘ You wait till you ’ve seen as many as we have. Most of them aren’t a bit lovely—that ’s only in the novels. They ’re dreadfully rough to look at as a rule, with prickly beards—and vermin ! And most of them are only common soldiers. Not a bit the sort to fall in love with.’

‘ What nonsense, Affi,’ answered the pretty novice. ‘ Fall in love with them, indeed—we ’re not schoolgirls. But you can’t help feeling for them, after they ’ve been all but killed out there. It ’s quite a different thing. And as for their being only common soldiers—well, I think I like them best. And the uglier and dirtier they are . . .'

' . . . The more you love them ?' cried the fair girl, and the other laughed.

'Exactly. And I like the common soldiers best. Any one can be nice in a drawing-room.'

'Really, if we are to have wounded heroes, I should certainly prefer them without vermin,' said the elderly nurse. 'I can't help it—it makes me shudder.'

'That 's all affectation really,' whispered the fair Sister to the dark girl at her side. 'She 'd take any one, however nasty, if they 'd only have her. But nobody will.'

'Affi, don't be horrid !'

There was the sound of a motor hooting outside.

'Here they come !'

Two ambulance waggons drove up first, followed by a number of hired motor cars, with two officers in each. The dressers hurried down to help the badly wounded upstairs. The girls stared in surprise—the men were all old. Even young subalterns looked extraordinarily aged; sharp-nosed, hollow-cheeked, and with stubbly beards of a dirty grey.

'There 's nothing very fascinating about any of them up to now,' said Sister Affi with a sigh. 'There 's your soldier, Erika, the one getting out now, with his arm in a sling. Come along, I 'll take the other.'

Zillner and Sarapatka stood at the foot of the steps; the two girls hurried down to them. 'This way, please. We 'll help you upstairs.'

The poet looked at them with eloquent eyes. 'Most kind, most kind! Angels of mercy—Ah !'

'Only Sister, if you please. Where are you hurt ?'

'Contusion and shock,' said Hans Heinz darkly. And on the way up he gave a thrilling description of how the explosion of a heavy shell had thrown him to the ground. 'Those big shells are terrible things. Rushing down upon you out of the unknown, whirling poor human bodies away in atoms. And the mere force of the air is so terrific that it can fling a man down like a plaything! I was fortunate, Sister.'

'How prettily you speak. Just like an actor. Then you can't be very badly hurt, that 's a good thing. But it must be dreadful. . . .'

Hans Heinz produced an affecting tremor of the voice. 'Ah . . . dreadful! . . . One's head is racked with agonising pains, and all one's nerves. . . . For the moment, though, I feel vastly improved.' He looked his fair companion covertly up and down, noting the rounded contours of her figure. 'To fall into such hands!'

The Sister opened a door. 'This will be your room.' The little dormitory with brilliantly polished floor and two rows of beds looked most inviting. 'You will want a bath, of course?'

Sister Erika took the cue, and put the same question bashfully to Zillner. He was so dreadfully solemn, this man, not a bit like the other. But he looked up at her now with a grateful smile, and she took courage. 'I must help you.'

Zillner felt a pleasant warmth at his heart. This delicate girl. . . .

'Thank you, Sister, you are very good. But . . .'

'I 'm sure you can't manage by yourself, with your arm. . . .' The novice hesitated between embarrassment and the desire to help. 'I 'll be so careful, and not hurt you a bit.' And her eyes turned to his in childlike appeal.

He looked at her earnestly. 'How kind you are!'

The girl lowered her eyes. 'We are here to help, you know.'

'There are ways of doing it. I like your way,' he said earnestly. 'Not every one is good as well as . . .'

He paused. 'Come,' she said, and was all motherly energy and busy care. But her cheeks glowed.

Sister Eva led her poet to the bathroom and took her leave. 'I think you 'll find everything you want,' she said. And then you will have some lunch—let me see . . cutlets, omelette, and tea or coffee . . .'

'And cocoa,' whispered Erika.

The poet's eyes shone. 'Never in my life have I found myself so near to paradise,' he affirmed solemnly. 'Lunch—I shall be delighted. If you would come and let me know . . .' He spoke with a caressing warmth. Then, with a graceful gesture of adieu, he withdrew to his bathroom.

Zillner, in the bathroom next door, submitted not without embarrassment to the touch of his nurse's fingers as she removed his tunic and shirt. This girl, so young, so evidently unused to the work, and so unlike the hardened professional type—he would have preferred to manage by himself. But with his arm it was impossible. The shoulder seemed bricked up in bandages.

'There! it 's slipped. I must put on a new one. Be careful not to make it wet.'

Zillner found it difficult to fall in with the situation. Here was a young girl of good family, such as he had been accustomed to meet in the empty whirl of social intercourse, standing over him like a mother and pulling off his shirt. He was the more embarrassed of the two.

'There! that 'll do.' She turned to the bath and waved a thermometer. 'How do you like it?'

'Just as you think best, Sister.'

'Better not make it too hot. I think you 'll find that right.' She cast a glance round and moved to the door. 'I 'll send a man up to help you with the rest. Be careful with the bandage, won't you?' And with a little nod she left the room.

Zillner looked after her. Out of the chaos of misery, hope and doubt and despair, out of the ruin of his shattered world, rose like a flower the delicate figure of a woman.

. . . .

Hans Heinz, the poet, was a most satisfactory case. He improved wonderfully. His Roman countenance regained the expression of condescending superiority which the discomfort and peril of active service had come near to effacing altogether. His clean-shaven cheeks were perhaps a trifle paler than in the days of peace, and there were dark rings round his thoughtful eyes, but that only made him the more interesting. He knew it, and made the most of it, as he strolled with easy graceful gait about the place, shaking his perfumed locks and glancing about him with the air of one whose future is assured.

'Isn't he handsome?' whispered the Sisters, as he passed them with a kindly encouraging smile. 'There's a dreadful fascination about him,' the girls of excitable temperament agreed, and those of a more æsthetic turn murmured ecstatically, 'And only fancy—a poet too!'

Before he had been twenty-four hours in the place, he had confided his divine mission to them all, and promised them his autograph.

'And for you, Sister Eva—you shall have a poem all to yourself. I can feel it coming!'

She had really made a great impression on him. And it was a pity, therefore, that she herself seemed so little able to appreciate the costly gift he promised. 'Really!' was all she said—and afterwards she expressed her surprise at his being able to write any new poems at all after being so badly hurt. A shallow creature, thought Hans Heinz, with an irritating roughness of manner at times. Well, she should find her master. He could not know that she privately regarded him as a conceited ape—and, had he known it, he would certainly have forgotten it at once, as something beneath his notice. As it was, the fair head and pleasantly rounded figure set the little channels of his genius aflowing, and filled him, indeed, with a rich supply of lofty thoughts. Hans Heinz was in the best of spirits; every day was a holiday to him, thanks to his contusion and Sister Eva.

It seemed an easy matter now to start in earnest upon the work which was to be the one unique real epic of modern war. And before long the thunderous lines of Canto I. were down in black and white.

Zillner's wound proved more serious than he had thought. The bullet had passed through his shoulder, tearing away a great piece of flesh at its exit. The wound had festered, and brought on a fever.

Hans Heinz lay in the same room. And in the intervals of poetic production, when he lay drawing inspiration from the wintry sough of the trees without, or polishing his nails, or silently contemplating Sister Eva's charms, he would from time to time vouchsafe a sympathetic inquiry as to how Zillner was getting on, and be relieved to hear that he was making progress.

But when Zillner one day suggested that Sarapatka was looking splendidly fit, and would soon be able to return to the front, the poet's lofty forehead darkened. 'My dear fellow,' he said reproachfully, 'how can you think of such a thing? The physical symptoms are less poignant, I admit, but that is not all. I would not wish my worst enemy to suffer the tortures I endure. A mental obsession—hallucinations . . . noises, terrific, appalling! Thunder of guns and incessant rattling volleys . . . at night I am surrounded by horrors. Sleep is impossible. Dead men stand round and glare at me, and voices—voices! . . . No! Painful as it is to remain inactive in a time of great things happening, there is no help for it. I must pack myself off to a sanatorium—a thorough rest-cure is the only thing.'

'But really, I thought . . . from the way you snore all night long. . . .'

'All night long. . . . No, no! In moments of utter exhaustion, perhaps, when the agonising visions leave me for a brief space. But beyond that—my dear sir, you must have been dreaming. I should be sorry to see another suffer as I do at nights. You have no conception of what it means.'

And Hans Heinz inquired no more after his companion's health. A few days later he came in himself in triumph, waving a doctor's certificate before Zillner's eyes. 'There—read that, and perhaps you will understand.'

The order stated that Hans Heinz Sarapatka, suffering from violent neurasthenia, was to be granted three months' sick leave.

'You see,' exclaimed the poet. 'Thank heaven there are yet doctors in the country who understand their business.'

'I see,' answered Zillner. 'I hope you 'll be all right again soon.'

'It will take time,' said the poet firmly. 'That sort of thing is not cured in a month. I shall go to the Wienerwald at first, and see how I get on there. Once I am thoroughly restored—then comrade'—his voice had something of the old heroic ring—'then, if such be His Majesty's pleasure, I shall be proud and happy to return to the arena!'

Hans Heinz walked off with light and easy gait to inspect the new travelling trunk which he had ordered in. Zillner watched him as he bent over it, deftly and neatly packing away his clothes and a host of little trifles. A sense of loathing came over him—an intense and nauseating hatred of the ingrained falseness and meretricious seeming with which this man, like so many others, faced the demand for sacrifice. All those actors, gaudy, jangling pageant figures, who had trooped in on to the scene at the first outbreak of war, heralding and glorifying it with hollow phrases, only to retire into the background as reality approached, and pull the strings from a safe distance. They were fitting company for the Pharisees and hypocrites who juggled with dreadful facts, sugaring disaster for the simple by assuring them it was the will of God. Cheats and swindlers, blasphemously invoking the Almighty to witness that murder was a sacred thing! What a ghastly failure was this world, with its superficial codes of morality, its religions sowing love and reaping hate, its pseudo-sages in their cobwebbed studies, strewing out nebulous ethics over the earth, and thinking to illuminate it as with a sun. A boy with a pistol—and the learned theories collapse! A shot in the streets of Serajevo, and ethics, treaties, moral codes are forgotten in a moment; the dusty volumes of the sages are torn to shreds, and humanity stalks the earth nakedly barbarous, with shouts of hate, and threatenings, and a wild delight in massacre and destruction. Massacre and destruction in the name of a beneficent God! Men of a cultured age, yet with passions no more tempered, no less lewd than in the youth of the world, when they had fought in cave and forest, crushing their fellows with stones, or tearing them with their teeth. No better than the predatory biped of those earliest ages, only a little more complicated in externals. The whole structure of society was founded on a lie . . . a lie patent to all save the poor ignorant victims whose bones were crushed to make the mortar of the building, and the dreamers in the attics, whose brains were mazed with their own imaginings. The honest souls, the men of simple faith, were cheated. But the gluttons who could thrive on it all know well that the fairy palace was a sham, and they worshipped it, exploiting the faith of the simple in the name of God.

. . . .

Soft twilight flowed in through the window, flooding the room with a milky gloom. Zillner looked up, and saw in the doorway the dark, slender figure of the young novice. Quietly she stepped across the room. ‘Temperature please, Captain. It ’s four o’clock!’ She took the thermometer, and went to the window to read it. ‘37·3—you ’ve no fever now! I ’m so glad!’ Her voice rang with honest sympathy.

He took her hand and kissed it. ‘Thanks, Sister Erika. You are always so good and kind.’

‘I ’m glad you ’re better,’ she said simply. ‘Perhaps you will feel more cheerful now—not always so dreadfully sad.’

‘You must come often, Sister Erika—then I shan’t think of the sad things so much. Will you?’

‘I?’ she murmured shyly—‘How can I?’

‘Only come sometimes, and bring a little sunshine.’

She glanced down at him; his eyes burned with appeal. A sudden feeling almost of terror seized her: she felt herself drawn, unwillingly yet irresistibly, down towards the eyes that asked something of her, something that her youth and girlish shyness feared to see.

'I will come as often as I can. Good-night.'

She hurried away, leaving Zillner to weave golden dreams through the dark.

. . . .

Golden dreams! . . . it was good to lie and work the pattern out. Untiringly the pictures wove themselves into a gossamer veil about herself and him, while others were moaning and dying. Dreams soft as the starlight, with no kiss to break the delicate threads, no rough grasping after palpable things that would have torn the fabric. They walked together as on a day of early spring, all shy budding and longing, with the heat and flower of summer immeasurably far off. Zillner felt himself refreshed. The chaos out of which he had come was gone, and he no longer looked back. He felt vaguely that care and kindliness and love were all about him, and it made him glad. The dark road where the ruins of his soldierly ambition were left behind had opened out into a new and brighter way, lit by another sun. And a maiden led him, half unconscious, softly, by the hand, and he closed his eyes and followed whither she would. So he dreamed himself slowly on into a new life.

His wound had ceased to pain him, but he was still unable to lift his arm. The doctors declared that it would be sound and well in three months' time. So the days came and went, and his soul rose tentatively on its wings. Often it would fly abroad, seeking for the comrades who were fighting and suffering in the cold up there in the north. It fluttered down to the grimy little men living like beasts in the trenches, waiting with dull eyes to be led to slaughter. It hovered over many graves, and lingered often about that strip of sand where the big body of his brother officer had been laid to rest. And then it would come rushing back to the present, to the sight of a slender girlish figure, where it rested, feeling safe and warm, as in a world of flowers. The world without was dry and withered, the climate so harsh that the little herb of truth could not grow there.

The papers made that plain. Zillner read the brief, evasive *communiqués* from the General Staff, and the carefully turned comments. He read the laboriously constructed accounts sent in by special correspondents, whose work it was to make thrilling copy and describe furious encounters out of such matter as they could gather in the furnished rooms of the press quarters far in the rear. He noted with infinite scorn the efforts of that victorious war-bird who regularly filled his little column with new and original heroic deeds. 'This way, ladies and gentlemen—this way for the heroes! Fresh every week!' And the heroes spread their wings in the morning edition, and twittered loudly of things done. As to where the ever-retreating armies had last halted, this could at best be vaguely conjectured by piecing together of mysterious allusions. The fable of 'situation unchanged' had apparently been abandoned; but there was still no definite information that could be relied on. How far had the troops fallen back? Zillner puzzled over the question in vain. The official reports said nothing, and the war-bird's weekly show of heroes remained carefully reticent as to the state of things.

. . . .

Early in December, Karl Albert Kraft was brought in to the hospital, with a nasty bullet wound in the leg. Zillner was horrified at the change in his old friend's face. The quondam enthusiast lay there grey and haggard, with thin, compressed lips, and spoke bitterly of what had passed at the front. The Russians had advanced almost into Krakau itself. 'And we are simply going to pieces,' he went on. 'The Honveds and the Ruthenian Landwehr are useless; the Czech regiments run like hares. Our corps had hardly more than eight thousand rifles all told, but they go on ordering us about as if they had forty thousand to play with. It 's sheer madness. It will be all over with us soon at this rate.'

'What—have *you* lost faith now ?'

'I 've no faith in ourselves any longer,' said Karl Albert harshly. 'Unless Germany comes to the rescue. German strength and perseverance—that is what we need ; if not . . .' And he groaned. Then he went on excitedly : 'I got knocked out about forty kilometres from Krakau. Nearly taken prisoner too. It was a headlong retreat, without any pretence at keeping order. We were supposed to check the mass of the Russian advance—hardly a single corps we were all told, a mixed up contingent of different regiments that had been shot to pieces and thrown into confusion already, and the enemy five to one. And then, mark you, as a piece of sheer lunacy, the main body of our army from the line of the river was ordered to entrain at once for the north—the Germans there were being forced back on Warsaw, so it was said. We had to reconstruct our front—yes, that 's what they call it—and temporarily evacuate, etc., etc. The whole thing was carried out in a frantic hurry ; at the first news of that reverse in the north, we gave up the whole of the country we had won back at such a cost—every foot of it bought with blood ! And all simply thrown away !'

'I couldn't understand it either,' said Zillner. 'Falling back continually, without plan or order—just as we rushed in headlong last August, with no idea of what we were going to do. I was wounded on the third day of the retreat—I never dreamed it would be as big a thing as you say.'

'You were lucky !' said Karl Albert with a bitter smile. 'It was only just beginning then. The rest were bundled off headlong to the railway, and sent on from there. Our corps was ordered to stay behind and check the enemy as far as we could. We hung on as hard as we could—the German regiments . . . but what could we do against hundreds of thousands ? It was only a question of time.'

‘ And the German operations about Warsaw—what happened there ? ’

‘ The Germans faced about and pressed forward again. It was only a temporary retirement. But we had given up miles of our own territory, after it had cost us no end to win it back once. It ’s enough to make one sick.’

‘ And what do you think will be the result now ? Surely they won’t let the Russians surround Krakau ? It would throw open the whole of Silesia and Mähren.’

‘ Oh, they ’ll wait and see how things go on. That is to say, they see the Russians making a happy little parade ground of the whole country, and they look on—giving them time to strengthen their position. And by the time the enemy ’s dug himself in, made first-rate systems of trenches and got up his batteries into excellent positions—then they ’ll have a sudden fit of energy, and set to work to try and turn him out. Like letting a burglar get comfortably into the house, watching him barricade himself neatly, and then suddenly coming to the conclusion that he ’s no business there at all. It ’s the ghastliest muddle ! We shall be the laughing-stock of the world ! ’

Zillner looked at his friend in much concern ; the bitter irony with which he spoke was altogether unlike his ordinary genial optimism.

‘ You think it ’s hopeless, then ? ’

Karl Albert shrugged his shoulders. ‘ If our allies in the north come in and help us, stiffen us up and push us on the right way, we may pull through. If not . . .’

. . . .

‘ Sunday, then. You can come to dinner, and tell me all about your little passage of arms with von Kreutzen. It was a mad thing to do, but it ’s just like you to do it.’

Clarisse smiled under her veil, and pressed his hand as he lifted hers to his lips. Yes, he would come to dinner. The Kärntnerstrasse was crowded with well-dressed idlers ; he watched her till she disappeared in the throng. The accidental meeting had taken him by surprise. How handsome she was—and as young as ever ! The heaviness of the times had not touched her; she spoke of the war as if it had been a charity bazaar.

Zillner strolled down towards the Opera, feeling a little chagrined. Her easy assurance of manner as she greeted him had thrown him into a momentary confusion; the charm that lay about her like a splendid garment made itself felt even now. The frank confession in her eyes, too, had embarrassed him; they told him so plainly that she had not forgotten. It would have been wiser not to have accepted that invitation. Still, there could be no danger now. He was steeled against all other charms by the thought of one young girl, modest and sweet as violets, fresh and pure as the waters of a mountain spring. He could only think of her in lovely words. It would have been better, perhaps, to have avoided any further meeting with Clarisse . . . but it would have been awkward to explain. . . . After all, to go and dine with an old friend—it was ridiculous to take such a trifle seriously!

The crowd flowed past him, pulsing with life and the longing for life. Women with rounded arms, and eyes that seemed to beckon him with a promise—life—the same life that only some few kilometres off was shed in waste upon the sand. Perhaps the very worthlessness of life there made one the more eager to drink deep of it here. There was a dance of death toward, and those whose lot it was to sit out were aglow with a double fervour. The air was full of chattering and cooing, heralding the duel to be fought for the life that was to come. The women had with sympathetic mimicry adopted the *feldgrau* colour of the men, and tripped about, ready and eager to do their part for the future of the race; the part that should make them mothers of heroes or cowards, great or small, wise men or diplomats. Dark shadows, mothers and wives in mourning, flitted through the throng, trailing black robes, black veils—a living accusation against the war that had taken their dear ones. But the life of the crowd, unheeding, unconcerned, save for itself, laughed brutally. Let the dead bury their dead—think of the living and the living that are to come. And life was right—the life that goes on cannot pause to think of the dead.

There were fewer men than in times of peace, but always more than one seemed to expect; men with some physical defect which rendered them unfit for life at the front, and others who were considered indispensable in the multifarious life of departmental work. All of them appeared to realise that their sex was at a premium. But the real heroes—they strode like gods among the rest. The women flocked about them, slipped by them with a touch that pretended to be inadvertent, hardly concealing the desire that was constantly whispering within. There were many heroes abroad that day. Some limped on crutches; most of them had one arm in a sling, as Zillner himself. Some, too, wore a becoming black bandage across the face, hiding a first gentle reminder from the man with the scythe.

And life called: you are the chosen, take what is yours. Make the most of the hour that remains; drink, and drink deep of the sweetness, for the time is short. To-morrow, perhaps, the hail of lead will strike you down. Drink, and do not let life slip by. . . . And they heard, and took. It was war time, and they made their wooings short, and bade defiance to the fate that called them to the slaughter. The departmentals heard, and strove not to be left behind. Even the brainless drones of diplomats, it was said, made progress in that time of death. Only the refugees from wasted Galicia trailed in melancholy flocks up and down the streets, talking excitedly, and with wild gestures accusing heaven. But even they answered to the call of life. And life smiled, knowing that all must pay its due; knowing that its grim antagonist must be outdone at last.

Zillner walked back to the hospital under a blazing sun, with the witching murmurs of the eternal mystery ever in his ears.

. . . .

Under a blazing sun he strode through days and weeks. The noises of the happenings in the north and south came to him only as a faint echo. All Vienna seemed wrapped and muffled to keep out the hellish din of pandemonium that rose from the places where men died. The fugitives cried aloud, but their voices were discreetly muffled by the press till their tale could be heard without offence. Only once, when the melody of '*Prinz Eugen*' ended in a too violent discord—when the city and fortress of Belgrade, after capture by the Austrians, was lost again almost at once—only then did the gay orchestra fail.

Karl Albert cursed and swore with German thoroughness, and Zillner called to mind the evening at the Konzert-Haus, when Zapperer had talked about how Serbia was to be crushed, how the plucky little country was to be laid at His Majesty's feet by the middle of August at latest. . . . The Chief, it will be remembered, had been of the same opinion.

It was now the middle of December, and the tones of '*Prinz Eugen*' were drowned in a swamp of blood.

. . . .

Christmas Eve came round, with its beauty and kindliness and gifts. Women's hands had been lovingly at work upon a Christmas tree for the wounded; its 'Peace on earth; goodwill towards men' shone out so grandly aloof from war and the doings of war, that Zillner forgot all that had been, and gave himself up to the good old customs and to the gaze of a pair of warm brown eyes that shyly sought his own. And the second star that beckoned him—the beacon of a meaner desire—paled and died out that night.

How pure and delicate she was.

Karl Albert, heated by Christmas cheer, flung about impatiently in bed. 'What 's the sense of lying here doing nothing, and being spoiled by the Sisters, bless them! We 've no business to be idling here any more. The others are dying out there, while we are making love. Yes, you too—I 've seen you making eyes at

Sister Erika; I 'm not blind. A nice sort of soldier, aren't you?'

Zillner laughed. 'Yes, it is about time we got out of all this. But we shall have to wait a bit, I 'm afraid. You hobble about as lame as a General Staff report, and my arm 's not much better.'

'H'm,' grumbled the painter. 'It 's all very well for you—tied up to a petticoat. But I 'm getting sick of it lying here doing nothing, with the biggest thing we 've ever been in for going on out there—and we 're out of it all.'

'Lying up like pashas and getting fat,' laughed Zillner. 'You 're right. It 's time we were out of it.'

But Zillner's thoughts were far from war and battles, sailing over a rosy sea.

. . . .

Then came a day when the warm south wind played among the trees of the park, and Karl Albert stepped out over the wet gravelled walks, trying the strength of his leg in a march at the regulation pace. 'Hurrah!—getting on finely,' he cried, and looked round beaming.

And Zillner held out his left arm, and swung it round in circles. 'All right again now.'

And chaos grasped at them, calling them back to the places whence they had come; they had but one thought now—to report themselves as fit for service again.

The spring might rustle there among the trees full of rising sap; might shake the buds with the impatience of a lover till they awoke and opened out; might sing its loveliest songs from the throats of happy birds—the two men did not heed.

Karl Albert was full of great majestic thoughts; the call of his splendid race in its hour of need; he was burning to be in action once more, to feel himself a part of the giant body, a living atom in the mighty Pan-Germanic force.

Zillner's heart suffered at the parting. But his soldierly faith was growing stronger, and he helped it on as bravely as he might by the thought of the grimy, wearied men, the poor simple souls that suffered out there. And he felt himself longing to be among them once more.

Next day the two men went off in a car, and a girl's eyes watched it till it disappeared through the gates, and left her gazing into the sky, that rose bluely over the spring-swelling trees.

And Sister Erika groped her way slowly up the steps into the house.

CHAPTER XIV

In Vienna the heavens had drawn their light of spring from eyes bright with girlish, reluctant longing. In the little Hungarian town the sky was grey. There was no need of brightness there : who would have cared for it ? Not the peasants and drivers, urging heavy-laden waggons through the sticky swamps that served as roads, nor the soldiers dragging mud-burdened boots through heart-breaking depths of mire. Not even the quondam Brigadier, now further promoted to Field-Marshal, who had for three weeks past been ‘ holding the position.’ He sat in his little town, a dismal pessimist, bowed over his microphones, and would not have heeded the sky however bright it might have been. No, grey was the only suitable dress—for all concerned.

And so the sky looked down sullenly over the land, as if cast in lead ! A great dome of unbroken grey, melting away in the south into undulating country with low hills, and sharply serrated on the north by the black points of the pine forests. Mightily, heavily, it rose from the mountains there, where the far guns could be heard thundering sullenly. Grey, all grey, a lashing of whips and cursing of men, a creaking of waggons and gasping of horses, the plodding of heavy boots through the mud—all seemed grey as the sky.

Zillner and Kraft had come out with drafts of reserves from the depots to join their regiments. They listened to the voices of the guns, and knew that chaos was near. Heavy guns roared out a welcome : ‘ Come, all is as it was ; you will find what you left. Last time at the river, now in the mountains.’ Like a great bell calling cattle to the slaughter—so rolled that thunder from the hills.

The two friends marched silently side by side, the new recruits behind them, weighed down with the burden of their winter clothing and accoutrements, plodding on into the unknown. In a little village not far from the forests that cut off the leaden sky, they separated; Kraft had still many kilometres to go, but Zillner had reached his destination now, and went in at once to report.

Colonel Zwirner sprang up from his armchair with a certain hurried geniality of manner, rang his heels together, and slapped Zillner on the shoulder, with an ingratiating smile. 'Delighted to have a good man back again,' he said heartily. 'The position at present is this. . . .' And he went on to explain at considerable length the disposition of the troops on the hills, the scheme of their defences, and how they had hitherto contrived to bar the way against all attempts of the Russians to force a passage into Hungary. The regiment had done excellently. 'Hold on stubbornly, and never yield a foot. That must be our motto,' he concluded, 'until our German allies can come up—then forward, shoulder to shoulder! The eyes of Austria are upon us here—that must nerve us to maintain the struggle.' Another clap on the shoulder, and a ring of the spurred heels: '*Auf Wiedersehen!*'

Zillner had an uncomfortable feeling of having heard it all before, only to be disappointed. This new man certainly proffered the stereotyped phrases with a certain forceful confidence, but he was clearly of the sort whose one main interest is their own advancement; one could not altogether trust him. There was a suspicious twitching of the corners of the mouth, his eyes were restless, and his forehead wrinkled and smoothed continually, betraying a current of thought not always agreeable to himself.

'Looks a better sort than the last,' commented Zillner afterwards, speaking to the Adjutant outside. 'What's happened to Colonel Prapora—have they made him Brigadier already?'

Captain Würkner sat in a sort of pantry, drawing maps. His face, always pale, was grey and haggard now from want of sleep. He shrugged his shoulders in answer to Zillner's words: ' The last man—no, he 's at a sanatorium. Nervous breakdown. It was about time too. You 've no idea what we had to put up with before their lordships saw what was wrong. The regiment was simply going to the dogs. As for myself—well, if we hadn't got rid of him, I should have blown my brains out, I think. All this winter . . . you may think yourself lucky you were out of it.'

' But now ? It 's not so bad as it has been, I hope ? '

' Oh, things are—well, better than they were,' said Würkner slowly, and his near-sighted eyes wandered indecisively over Zillner's face. ' We manage somehow. You 'll see for yourself very soon. Zwirner is one of those fellows who pat everybody on the back—you know what I mean, so don't make too much of your reception to-day. Still, he 's seen service, at any rate, the last year, and has some idea of handling men.'

' Plenty of energy, it seems.'

' Yes, I dare say. He 's not altogether a neurasthenic wreck up to now, seems to have some grit in him, and isn't always bothering about his bomb-proof shelter as the last man was.'

Zillner looked at the other in surprise. ' You 've changed a good deal yourself,' he said. ' I 've never known you speak so bitterly before.'

' Changed !—H'm, well, yes, I dare say one does, you know. If you 'd been through these last few months here ; men dying off uselessly in front, and a fool of a colonel behind, and behind him again the Division Commander—it 's a wonder I 've any wits left. We 've picked up a bit lately—the Germans are coming to help, so they say. But three weeks ago, when we set out to relieve the fortress and failed . . . It was the usual thing ; advance at haphazard, then rolled up and headlong in retreat. I 'd a thousand times rather have an honest bullet through the brain than go through all that once more. Ask the Major—he 'll tell you what it was like. I haven't time now. See this—coloured sketches of the ground held by battalions, "with profiles of all defences"—for Division Headquarters, you understand. They don't leave one much time.' And Würkner bent over his colour box and papers once more.

Zillner went across to battalion headquarters. Major Blagorski, too, was changed. In the half dark of the little room sat a grey shadow of a man with a straggling moustache; a shadow, that greeted him with melancholy friendliness, offered him a chair, and poured out a couple of glasses of liqueur brandy. 'Glad to see you back, Captain. There aren't so many of the old lot now. We can't complain, though. Grill and Crlenjak are here still. But Pfustermeyer—well, you know, of course . . . and poor Hallada! he was always a little afraid of me—I don't know why. Yes, they 're gone. . . . And I 'm the only one of the battalion commanders that 's left. Take a drop more? Yes, we 've had a hard time of it this winter. Fighting nearly every day. . . . Let me see, what was your company? Number four—yes, yes. You won't find many of the old ones left. The little cadet, the Hungarian, what was his name—he was shot, and the other one died of fever. Makes one feel lonely in a way. . . . Sort of left behind, you know. . . .'

A wave of bitterness and anger surged through Zillner's heart. He too—Andrei. The brave boy with eyes of a young eagle, his favourite, and now picked out by blind, mad chance. . . . The Major sat drumming on the table with his fingers, murmuring to himself, 'Left behind, left behind.' His eyes were full of tears. Then suddenly, as if ashamed of having betrayed his feelings, the grey old soldier sat up stiffly, and cleared his throat. 'Doesn't do to think too much. No. And you mustn't fancy, from what I 've said, that . . . I mean; it 's not so bad, you know, after all. We 're fit enough, and we can hold on all right. The men are good stuff, the younger ones especially. The oldsters are a trifle nervous perhaps. But taking it all round, things aren't so bad. Not bad at all. There, my dear fellow, you 'll see we shall manage all right. You 'd better get some rest while you can. We 're in reserve to-day.'

Zillner turned to go. In the doorway, the Major called him back. 'By the way, there 's one thing . . .' He put on his glasses and fumbled among the papers on the table. 'Army order—and a nasty one to hear. Here it is.' And he read aloud: '"Army Order. Intelligence Department reports that the Russians are organising Czech battalions to take part in the operations on the Warsaw front. Russian prisoners confirm this, and state that Austrian prisoners of Slav origin are invited to enter these battalions, especially those of Czech nationality. It has further been found that Russian agents are distributing certificates to Czech soldiers testifying to their Pan-Slavonic sympathies. In order to combat these treacherous intrigues, company commanders will frequently and without warning search the persons of the men, with a view to ascertaining whether any are in possession of such certificates, or other documents, emanating from the Pan-Slavonic propaganda. Any men on whom such papers are found will be handed over at once under escort, to be dealt with by the Divisional Command."

'So you see there 's blackguardism about,' went on the Major. 'Not among our people, I 'm glad to say; still, you never know. The new Colonel—yes, he 's very nice and obliging always—he says the same thing: Can't be too careful. So you 'd better make your visitations according to order. *Servitore,* Captain.'

Zillner found his company greatly changed in outward appearance. Almost all the men were new to him; the few old hands looked almost grotesque in their ragged uniforms, supplemented now by all sorts of civilian winter clothing as worn by the natives of the country round. Woollen hose and kneewarmers, jerseys, short fur coats of peasant make, felt boots, and knitted mufflers, often in the queerest combinations. The inevitable coating of dirt over all gave them at any rate a uniform colour. The ugly regulation headgear, which gave its wearers the expression of melancholy clowns, had almost entirely disappeared, being replaced by fur caps. Only the nineteen-year-old recruits were still neat and shining—even the lice hardly ventured to approach them, as yet. But a few weeks in the field would soon give them the proper tone and aroma. . . .

Nechleba, the scapegoat, was frankly pleased to see his captain again. And Zillner noticed that he wore the silver medal for courage on the breast of a looted yellow-grey Russian cloak. He said a few words of commendation, and the man explained with pride how he had taken a Russian officer prisoner while out with a patrol. 'And here, sir,' he went on, turning up the stock of his rifle—'Sixty-five of them up to now—all noted down.' He pointed with a grin to the ugly row of notches that marked his 'bag,' and stood as if conscious of having done something especially worthy of praise. But Zillner, looking into the fierce, wild face, with its black tufts of hair and beard, shuddered inwardly at the primitive bestiality of the man, and dismissed him with a perfunctory '*Schon gut, schon gut.*'

With such men, he thought, one might conquer the world—but what a world! Ashes and ruins, a desolation of misery and tears. With men of that type, Ghengis Khan and Tamerlane had laid Europe at their feet; the Turks had advanced to the gates of Vienna. The Nechlebas of the seventeenth century had formed the staple of that motley horde which for thirty years had trampled Germany underfoot. All for the glory of God—the God that sided neither with Luther nor with the Pope, but only looked on well pleased to see how men tortured and slew their fellows in His cause. Of the same type, too, were the men from whom Napoleon had drawn his finest warriors, the indomitable ones on whose breast he pinned the red-ribboned cross with his own hand. It was they who gave his mighty spirit the hand with which to smite; tigers of battle they were, beast-men, without restraint or scruple, cunning, wild, and cruel. Here was a man who had been in prison, and now wore the decoration coveted by heroes. In time of peace, thick walls were built to keep him apart from society, and thin-skinned laws sought to prevent the type from spreading. To-day he wears the Emperor's image in silver on his breast, and is honoured and admired by those who would before have drawn aside from him haughtily or in fear. Wild sacred force of war! Let loose the chiefs of the Apache bands, manslayers and past masters of the trade of murder; open the doors of gaols and turn the stream on to the fighting line, fill the trenches with undismayed artists in slaughter, the leaders of the guild—not lurking cowardly hyænas fit only to lie in ambush. Daylight murderers, men who kill openly and unashamed, they are the men who should be soldiers. Put them in uniform, send them to the front, and they would win gold and silver medals every one of them. The gallows-bird who knows his business, the bandit ready for any foolhardy venture: where would they find better use for their skill than in war, as servants of its 'wild and sacred' force. Men with some slight remains of culture, men who shudder weakly at the thought of fratricide, will at the best only drag half-heartedly through the ghastly work; even when the lust of blood is upon them, they can still remember that they are human beings. But the slayer by nature, the man of undiluted primitive barbarism, cuts notches on his rifle butt, and counts over the tale of his victims with pride and delight. And he is a hero—a winner in the lottery run by the rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Zillner's thoughts barked at him like furious hounds as he went to his quarters. And even after he had lain down in the straw to rest, there was still one that growled on. Why not let the great roulette players at the green tables cultivate that type of man for the future? Have a stock of them ready for the next world-war. In the sentimental times of peace, those pillars of society were often, it is true, liable to be hanged before they had had time to propagate—society had not properly realised their value to the race. The war must put an end to all those sickly scruples.

Wearied, and full of loathing, Zillner fell asleep at last. But a young girl came into his chamber and drove the hounds of his thoughts out into the chaos of the roaring night; and drew a soft veil over him as he slept. And lo, the hero Nechleba with his sixty-five notches vanished away—vanished with all his world of filth and lice and stoical misery draped in choice lying phrases. That first night in the Waldgebirge, Zillner slept in a great light hall, glittering with a silvery sheen. And his mother entered, a gleaming figure, with her good, anxious face—no, anxious no longer, but with a sunlit smile, such as he had rarely seen. And she led a young girl by the hand, a shy and slender girl in the black dress of a hospital nurse. 'Tell him,' said his mother, 'for he cares for you.'

And timidly the girl began:

'Take then my hand, and guide me
    Where thou dost wend,
Ever and aye beside me
    Unto the end.
Through all the world unheeding
    All else but thee;
Thy love my footsteps leading
    Eternally!'

And he felt her hand, and pressed and kissed it. And his mother was happy.

So fair were Zillner's dreams that first night in the Waldgebirge.

. . . .

Next morning he went out with his new subaltern to inspect the trenches of the section reserve. Lieutenant Artur Lewit was an excessively slender young man, with a businesslike politeness of manner and a thin face of the rodent type. In civil life, he was a partner in a drapery firm. He had been three months in the field, and his narrow chest was already decorated with the medal for courage. The two men walked slowly up the straggling mountain paths to a ridge fortified by a strong and carefully elaborated system of trenches. It was a little fortress in itself, with barbed wire entanglements, excellent machine-gun positions, and roomy underground quarters for officers and men. Left and right, the porcupine front extended as far as the eye could see, taking full advantage of the hilly and wooded country. The intervals between the separate positions were filled with abbattis, barbed wire, and pits lined with stakes, and masked batteries were drawn up at the village in the rear.

'Impregnable 's the word, sir!' said the slender lieutenant, with an elegant wave of the hand. 'The sappers have done their work well. Out there in front, the next ridge—another formidable line. We 've three positions, one behind the other. Impossible to break through—can't be done.' He sniffed at the moist air. 'Nothing much doing to-day—slack time.' He pointed over to the left: 'That corner of the wood there, that 's *côte* 679, where the Collaltos' rayon begins. The Russians have tried it six times, each time in enormous force—reckoned to take it by—what d' you call it?—by sheer weight of numbers. But they never reached within a hundred yards. And their casualties have been up as high as fifty per cent. There 's no margin in that sort of business—it doesn't pay.'

Zillner listened attentively. It interested him to note the confident, almost arrogant tone of this young gentleman, who came of a race that had been said to be of no military value in the field, and only serviceable to some extent on the general staff. Yet here was a subaltern, after three months of active service—three terrible winter months—looking out over the position with his keen crafty eyes, and talking triumphantly. A lark sprang up from the ground, and rose singing into the air, higher and higher; Zillner watched it floating like a tiny grey speck in the sky. And for the first time after many months he began to feel that the senseless flick and lash of orders from the rear, the hurry and confusion, the useless sacrifice of men in aimless advance and retreat, had after all not destroyed everything that was of value. There were still new forces left, growing stronger despite all the misery and muddle. The army, the people, were there still.

'And what do the men themselves think of it?' he asked. 'Are they as confident as their lieutenant?'

'Why, sir, that 's a difficult question to answer offhand.' The draper put his head on one side, with the air of a business man presiding over a liquidation. 'They 're rather sick of it, to tell the truth, especially the older ones. But they stick it. Making the best of a shaky market. They put in all they can, and I think they 'll go on. Sound, old-established firm, this army! It 's not going to pieces just yet.'

'But if the Russians can keep on throwing fresh masses of troops against us here—well, it might, I suppose?'

'It won't, sir—if you 'll excuse my saying so. I don't believe it can. Every man here knows what he 's fighting for. They 've all got their homes, and they know what 'll happen to them if we are knocked out here. Each one of them knows that if he runs away, it means danger to his home, his wife, his business, and then when things go wrong, he 's done for after all. So they stick it—hang on to their posts tooth and nail. It 's a fine thing!'

'You 're right there,' said Zillner. 'The finest thing the war has shown us, the only great thing about it all, is that wonderful strength of the people. Common men, born and brought up under a perfidious system, and thrust out into sordid, pitiable misery; each of them still holds fast by the one real thing behind all the false phrases, the sense of home. The great ones talk about the things they 're fighting for, but the common men die for them; and their lives are thrown away in what the great ones of the nation dare to call a righteous cause.'

Lewit whipped out a notebook with a sudden dexterous movement. ‘I wonder if you ’d mind my noting that down? “Born and brought up under a perfidious system, and thrust out into sordid and pitiable misery” —that ’s fine! Striking, incisive—very fine indeed! I was at a commercial school myself—we don’t get much poetry there, you know. By the way, sir, I shall have to report to you now, of course. There are one or two little trifles—men opening their emergency rations, and little things of that sort. Would you like the report brought up to your quarters, or to the office?’

‘At the office, please.’

‘Very well, sir. I will go on ahead and give the necessary orders.’ And with a brisk and elegant movement, the draper turned and strode away.

Zillner followed slowly. Larks hovered in the air on every side, singing and trilling invisibly out of the grey.

. . . .

The company commanders dined at the Major’s quarters, where Zillner’s air of health and general fitness excited much good-natured chaff among the rest.

‘Bullet through the shoulder ’s not such a bad idea after all,’ said Grill thoughtfully. ‘Wish I had your luck!’

Crlenjak, the withered mannikin, whose moustache had grown a shade whiter, murmured half to himself: ‘No, it ’s a funny thing. . . . Clothes all shot to pieces, but never a bit of a wound. . . . I don’t know . . .’

‘Never mind,’ said Zillner, ‘I haven’t a medal to stick on my tunic, like you. Congratulations, by the way.’

Both Grill and Crlenjak wore the red and white ribbon of watered silk that goes with the military cross.

‘It will come in time, brother, you won’t have to wait long. Especially since your subaltern is decorated—and a Jew into the bargain.’

'A very queer one, by the way,' put in Grill. 'Plucky, and up to all the arts of war—like the Maccabees. He was out a little while ago on a reconnaissance in the enemy's lines. Managed it finely. Got all but surrounded at the finish, and cut his way through in splendid style. It's all rot about the Jews lacking courage if they 're like him.'

'Wait a minute, brother'—the little Croat looked up from his plate and waved his knife in the air to command attention. 'He may be an exception, but it's a fact, about the Jews, as a race. A business people, but pluck—no! As a matter of fact, I don't understand . . .'

'My dear Jovo,' said Grill, his hard features curving to an ironical smile, 'you are mistaken. Strength makes the man, and the Jewish race is full of strength. I can't see at all why the cold intelligence and rapid presence of mind that all Jews have should not be enough to make them excellent soldiers. They have at any rate energy to subdue the inner man.'

'It's not, all the same,' cried the mannikin. 'And I'll tell you why. The Jew is too clever to be what we call plucky. He looks at the thing, and says to himself—there's no business in this; it's not a profitable deal. And so he prefers to keep out of it.'

'You might say the same of many Christians. But to say that Jews as a whole are a cowardly race is not fair to begin with, and they 've proved the contrary hundreds of times, in this war as well as others. I think we may take it that there are brave men and cowards in every race. Why should it be otherwise with the Jews?'

'Because—well, look at the way they live. Always turning up to do business in places where there's no personal risk, but as soon as it's a case of a real venture, with life at stake, there's not one of them . . .'

Grill put up one hand in protest. 'That's merely a popular prejudice. It may have been so to a certain degree in earlier times, but to-day, the Jew does his business amid all the dangers of a rather merciless world.

And he masters his trade, whatever it may be, and goes on perseveringly, everywhere. Why should he not master this ?'

'Well, he 's not sound, you know. You can't trust him. He 'd give away the Lord Himself if he saw any profit in it. Not to be trusted, brother—not to be trusted. Do anything for a price! And what . . . but I won't say any more.' The little man was red in the face, and pulled his moustache furiously.

'You 're prejudiced,' said Grill coldly. 'It 's no good trying to convince a man. . . .'

'Not a bit, brother, not a bit. . . .'

'Still, there 's a couple of things I 'd like to point out. In the first place, the Jews have tamed the filthiest and most dangerous beast that ever walked the earth—namely, the mob. Organised them—with the help of a few Christians—made men of them and given them some idea of their own power. A mighty work, far more difficult and dangerous than taming lions and teaching tigers to jump through circus hoops.'

'Tamed! Hoodwinked, you mean. Blinded them with a lot of swindling hocus-pocus! That 's all.'

'Even then. It was a plucky thing to start on. And however they managed it, they have succeeded in bringing the filthy proletariat to some sense of its human dignity, taught even the lowest to recognise that God's image among the poor is no more and no less than among kings and emperors. Don't mistake me, gentlemen. I don't say I admire the results, but merely the thing itself. And then the other thing I would ask you to remember. You say that the Jew would do anything for a price. A catchword! What does it mean: "For a price"? Look about you, and see where you can find any man who wouldn't do anything for a price. It 's only a question of how the price is to be paid. The Jews are no better than the rest of us, but they are certainly no worse. No worse than princes and priests, ministers and lickspittle courtiers. The only difference is that they 're generally cleverer, and better able to use their opportunities. And so they come out on top, and it 's the fashion to run them down for the way they managed it—especially among those who 're green with envy because they didn't manage it themselves.'

'Well, brother, I don't think I 'm green with envy,' put in the Croat. 'What do you mean? *Bogami!* I swear I don't envy them a bit.'

'My dear fellow, of course I wasn't thinking of you,' said Grill in a conciliatory tone. And Major Blagorski, who had been crumbling pellets of bread all through the discussion, suggested anxiously that they should change the subject.

There was a pause, but before a new topic could be started, there came an interruption from without. The Adjutant entered, with a telephone message from Division Headquarters that there was heavy fighting in progress on the heights occupied by the Collaltos, where strong enemy forces had attempted to break through. The battalion was to hold itself in readiness in cantonments, and await further orders.

The officers hurried out to their respective commands. The noise of the firing told that the Collaltos were heavily engaged. Even at that distance one could discern the sharp, irregular scolding of the musketry and the businesslike hammering of the machine-guns. The question as to Jews and their courage remained undecided. The Major glanced anxiously over in the direction of the Colonel's quarters. He was wondering whether any one had noticed that the alarm had found him sitting at dinner instead of in his office.

Zillner found his company already drawn up; the colour-sergeant was handing out reserves of ammunition. And the innocent object of the Grill-Crlenjak discussion reported smartly: 'All here, sir. Hundred and thirty-three rifles; and three hundred rounds per man.'

. . . .

The Tiefenbachers were not called upon to take part in the fighting that day. The firing, that had lasted all the afternoon, slackened towards the evening, and ceased altogether by sunset, when the treetops stood out sharply drawn against the red western sky, and blue-grey shadows crept over fields and meadows. And shortly after, news came in that the Collaltos had victoriously driven back a brigade of the enemy, almost annihilating a whole Siberian regiment, and taking many prisoners.

‘ First-rate stuff, the Collaltos,’ said Lieutenant Lewit, laying his head on one side with a satisfied air, as if reviewing the turnover after an autumn sale. ‘ German regiment. Stand any amount of wear.’

Late that night—the men had been dismissed—the telephone on Würkner’s map-littered table called up again. Urgent !

And a thick voice called along the wires : ‘ Hallo, hallo ! I ’m the Divisional Staff. The enemy have got in here. The staff has cleared out. Russians here already—hear what I say ? Hurry up and drive them back. For God’s sake, hurry ! ’

The Adjutant called back : ‘ Hallo ! Who ’s that speaking ? How many of the enemy—what ? ’

‘ I ’m Captain Za-Za-Zapperer. Urgent, as quick as you can ! . . .’ The voice stopped with a snap.

Würkner attempted several times to get on to the Division again, but without avail. The apparatus gave no answer, but he fancied he could hear the sound of firing. He gave it up, and hurried across to Major Blagorski’s quarters.

. . . .

A few minutes later Zillner and Crlenjak were leading their companies at the double along the muddy road to the village. The moon was nearly full, and the sky was full of milky clouds. After ten minutes or so, the headlights of a big car sprang upon them out of the vagueness ahead. The senior medical officer and the head of the supplies stood like pillars one on either step, the rest of the staff had packed themselves in the back seat or beside the driver. His Excellency, the quondam Brigadier, halted the car, and proceeded to vent his wrath upon Zillner. ‘You take your time, sir! The regiment is asleep, apparently. But I’ll wake them up, I’ll wake them up! The place is to be recaptured at once, you understand. A nice state of things, indeed! . . . At any cost—you understand? You have at least, I hope, arranged for quarters for us?’

Zillner could only say that nothing had been done with regard to this, as no information had been received of his Excellency’s coming that way at all.

‘What’s that? No information? Why, I gave orders. . . . Yes, to you, Captain Zapperer—how is this? Did you not pass on my instructions yourself?’

The answer came in a deferential whisper from the seat beside the chauffeur: ‘Your Excellency—the telephone—er—appeared to be out of order. And I judged it inadvisable to remain . . . our departure imperative. . . . I could not quite . . .’

His Excellency shook his head resignedly. ‘My staff!’ he said bitterly. ‘My staff! A little unexpected disturbance—and they cannot even arrange for my quarters. A pretty staff! But I’ll . . .’ He broke off suddenly, and, turning to the driver, roared out, ‘Go on, man, go on. . . .’ And then to Zillner: ‘You understand, Captain, the place is to be retaken—at any cost!’

The chauffeur had got down from the car, and was busy with the starting mechanism. Zapperer seized the opportunity, and whispered to Zillner: ‘Ah, my dear fellow—do me a favour! The archives, you know—reports, drafts, everything—er—left behind. If you could manage to . . . awfully obliged, awfully . . .’ His face was a sickly grey, and wore the expression of Macbeth perceiving Banquo’s ghost. This time it was no mask.

The car got under way and drove off. The little Croat captain looked after the retreating staff disgustedly. ‘Well, they’ve got the—h’m—stomach out of order,' he said philosophically. 'Anyhow, we 'd better get along.' And he strode off briskly.

The grey snaky lines of men went clattering on towards the village as fast as the sticky mud allowed.

. . . .

Shots rang out in the market place. Outside the division field hospital, a little way down the main street, stood a German doctor, waving the Red Cross flag. 'Don't draw their fire this way!' he shouted as the Tiefenbachers hurried past. 'We are unarmed. We are neutral, in the exercise of our calling. Don't draw them this way!'

Zillner could not help laughing at the sight of this Samaritan gesticulating with the banner of inviolable neutrality. 'All right,' he called back, 'we 'll do our best!'

The medico grounded his flag with a martial air, wiped his forehead, and snuffled out once more: 'We 're neutral. In the exercise of our calling. Don't forget!'

The two companies emerged into the square, and at the same moment a detachment of the Collaltos hurried up from the farther side, with loud hurrahs. The Russians were driven in confusion into the centre, or tried to make off down the side streets, only to find the way barred by the bayonets of Crlenjak's men. Zillner charged into the ragged groups; they flung down their rifles and held up their hands. Over seven hundred men, a whole battalion with their officers, surrendered on the spot. The officer in command explained that they had fallen into a trap, through having trusted to a peasant who had led them the wrong way. He accepted his fate resignedly, however, with a shrug of the shoulders, and said in broken Polish: 'For me, the war is now over. Kismet! You, gentlemen, will not be able to say the same. Not for a long time.'

The whole affair had scarcely lasted more than a quarter of an hour, and, save for a few men slightly wounded, there were no casualties. Zillner and Crlenjak shook hands heartily. 'Does me good, brother,' said the little man, ‘ to round up a few of the dogs like that.’ And he looked round contentedly.

A figure came running across from the other side of the square, where the Collaltos were drawn up—it was Karl Albert Kraft. He embraced Zillner excitedly. ‘ Well met again,’ he cried, his face beaming. ‘ This is the sort of thing to cheer a man up after hospital—what ? ’ He pointed to the groups of prisoners, that stood silent and helpless, surrounded by bayonets on all sides. ‘ Nothing very glorious, perhaps, but it does cheer one up to come out on top now and again.’

‘That ’s just what I say,’ put in the withered mannikin. ‘ Helps you to keep going. I ’m not as young as I used to be, but a little affair like this does freshen me up.’

The Mayor of the place came up with an obsequious smile, and the inhabitants began to approach timorously, and smiling a trifle anxiously at the victors. The staff company, which had held out pluckily against superior numbers until the reinforcements had arrived, took over the prisoners. And the moon peeped out from a bank of cloud, and looked down patronisingly on the little midnight scene.

But Kraft stared up with ardent eyes at the polished observer of men’s weal and woe, charmer and matchmaker from time immemorial. ‘ Yes, you can look,’ he cried gaily. ‘ We ’ll show you something else before very long—you wait ! ’

‘ Do you often make prophecies to the moon ? ’ asked Zillner with a smile.

‘ Prophecies ? It ’s a dead certainty, gentlemen. We got the news yesterday—the Germans are coming. A whole army of them, already on the way. We shall push forward then in style, and oh—you ’ll see. Life will be worth living again now ! ’

‘ Do you really think we can muster up a new offensive? I ’m very much afraid this last winter ’s pulled us down too much. The men aren’t what they used to be,’ said Zillner.

‘ Aren’t they ? You should have seen them this evening, as we started out. And they 'd no idea then it was going to be a walk over. No, we 're sound enough, only give us the proper leaders. Once the Germans begin to tackle the business, you 'll see, the slowest will pick up like anything. And as for the miserable Slavs, and Slovaks, and the rest of the cowardly mob, they 'll find it doesn't pay to run the wrong way now. The Germans will cure them of that. And we German-Austrians, we 've got to show that we 're as good as the Germans themselves, though they do look down on us at times. Yes, I know they think we 're just an effeminate lot, with no nationality, good for nothing but cookery and operettes. . . .'

'Why, brother, they can't say that now, after eight months of war,' put in Crlenjak.

'Maybe. But after all, we haven't done anything much really in those eight months. We 've had dreadful losses, both here and in Serbia—and with an army like ours, composed of different elements, and wretchedly led, it 's been hardest of all on us Germans. We 've been cut to pieces again and again, because they had to draw on us every time something went wrong with the others. But that 's over now. The Germans are coming down like an avalanche, and they 'll carry us on with them.'

'But this winter in the mountains, brother—we could never have stood that if we hadn't been strong in ourselves. I don't understand. . . .' The little Captain shook his head perplexedly.

'Of course—I don't deny it. It was a fine example of desperate endurance, but passive, passive! We 're just rooted to the spot. And we 've no proper cohesion, or faith, to go on with. All that we 've done here has been in self-defence, and we shall never make any real progress till the good old double eagle spreads its wings a bit. No, once the Germans come, you 'll see! There 'll be some proper flying then.'

'But our leaders will be the same, I suppose?' put in Zillner bitterly. 'The same old troupe—masters in the art of zigzag movement, doing wonders that don't come off with forces that they try to pretend are inexhaustible.'

'We shall keep them, of course. But it won't matter so much now. They 'll have to submit to the guidance of clearer heads—there 's no way out of it. And it 'll do them any amount of good. Thank Heaven it 's come at last—Germany, whole and strong!'

Zillner admired the truly Austrian enthusiasm with which Karl Albert gave himself up to splendid anticipations; he envied him his undivided confidence and force. Crlenjak looked at it differently. He did not at all approve of this incense on the altar of Germany which rose from the flame of Karl Albert's words. 'Well, I don't know,' he murmured, 'if they help us, we 're helping them all the time. They can't manage alone, it seems, any more than we. It 's simple enough. I don't see why we should look upon ourselves as their servants, and we 've been doing good work of our own without them.'

'But it 's not enough, my dear Jovo, it 's not enough! If we 're to . . .'

'I don't care. It 's *our own,*' said the little Captain angrily. '*Basta!*' And he strode off to his company.

Zillner hurried to Division Headquarters to give in his report of the night's work. The schoolhouse, where the headquarters had been situated, was silent as a palace of a sleeping beauty. The black-and-yellow flag drooped over the entrance, and a couple of trembling clerks cowered in the offices. A corporal sat at the telephone—the only man who had stayed at his post—with the receiver to his ear. The Division had rung up three times to hear how things were going. Zillner went to the apparatus, and stated briefly the result of the engagement. From the other end came something like a sigh of relief.

'Is that you, Würkner?' he asked.

'Oh, thank goodness, yes! His Excellency 's been fearfully impatient. Wait a minute, here 's Zapperer, wants to speak.'

'Hallo, hallo!—I 'm Zapperer,' came the new voice. 'My dear fellow, did you see about the papers? Are they there? What?'

Zillner was able to assure him that the precious documents were untouched. He had seen them himself. 'Everything as you left it,' he said.

'Oh, very good—er—thanks.' The voice had suddenly taken a less ingratiating tone. And the speaker rang off abruptly.

The Tiefenbachers tramped off homewards. Outside the hospital building a doctor stood waiting. He did not wave a Red Cross flag this time, but stepped up with a certain dignity of manner to Zillner and announced himself as 'Dr. Podlopny, of the Medical Staff. May I beg you to inform his Excellency that the field hospital under my command, albeit severely threatened, remained at its post, without a moment's thought of evacuating, and remained throughout attentive to the call of duty, the entire staff carrying on its work under my direction with the utmost coolness, despite the fighting close at hand.' Zillner promised to do so, and the doctor strode back, head in air, into the house.

The Lieutenant looked after him quizzically. 'That 's one of your heroic sort,' he said. 'And doesn't mean you to forget it.'

Zillner laughed. 'Yes—had his little speech off by heart, exactly in the style of the official notification when he gets the bit of ribbon he 's playing up for. What a picture! First one of them comes out waving his little banner and in mortal dread of it 's not being seen, and then, when it 's all over, the other one sees his chance and hastens to improve the occasion. Tragicomic, isn't it! What a miserable race of swindlers men are, changing their face to suit the need of the moment. Noisy, screaming charlatans, from the highest to the lowest, pushing and struggling and gesticulating—a world full of mountebanks and fools, and conceit—

and yet each one of them with a star of some sort to lead them on through filth and lies and darkness by some zigzag path to freedom. To the holy light on new, broad roads . . .'

'Beautiful, beautiful,' murmured Lewit admiringly.

. . . . . .

There was a cheerful buzz of talk in the ranks as the men marched on; but little Captain Crlenjak scowled as he strode through the mire. A little way out from the village he turned to Zillner: 'I say, I can't make it out—you and that fellow, the Lieutenant, what 's his name? All that nonsense about the Germans, and you agreed with him! They are to come and take us by the ear and lead us around just as they like—is that anything to be thankful for? I don't understand. . . . After all, we 're not children, you know. And the double eagle can surely fly without German fireworks under his tail. I don't see any sense in running down your own country; I don't like it.'

'I don't run down my own country,' said Zillner gently, 'but you can't blame Kraft for admiring those qualities in the Germans which we lack ourselves. After all, he 's a German himself. . . .'

'He 's not!' shouted the little man excitedly. 'He 's an Austrian—or should be! He was born in Austria, his parents and his ancestors lived there. And he lives there too—Austria is his home, his country. . . . What has he to do with Germany?'

'Lives there, yes,' murmured Zillner. 'But his home, his country. . . . You see he 's an artist, a forceful nature, a man of warm temperament, who takes life seriously and thoroughly. How could he ever feel himself as one of a nation that is not a nation, but an incoherent assembly of different peoples, with no common spirit beyond a common dullness, a disconsolate preoccupation with mean and trifling things? In Germany, he feels how his race has grown great and powerful, drawing its strength from the German soil. Here, it is but a sickly growth, choked by all manner of undergrowth that has been suffered to shoot up round it. It is not surprising that the German should look to Germany as his home.'

'But what about me, brother? I am a Croat—yet I love Austria as my country. My people have lived here, and many of them have shed their blood for its sake; we have not needed Prussian aid to make us happy.'

'We need them now, because our existence is at stake, and we should be thankful if they can save us from the peril which our fools of diplomats have brought upon us by their work. It has been gathering for years. And now it has come.'

'Fools of diplomats . . . what have they . . . I don't understand. . . .'

'Neither did they, and that is how they landed us in the mess. Now the whole world turns on us, calling us to account for their criminal follies—and we must look to Germany to help us out.'

'Well, and aren't we helping Germany too? The German diplomats are just as big fools as ours. It makes us quits, that 's all.'

'Not altogether. Our fools were bigger fools, and there were more of them, and that made the whole business more complicated. If the Germans help us now, the balance is in their favour.'

'That is to say you agree with the other man—what 's his name. Well, I don't understand. . . .'

'I don't look at things in the same way quite. He 's always rather enthusiastic, you know. I 'm no fervent admirer of Germany myself, and the Prussian type is too self-assertive, too boastful and conceited, for my taste. I 've no sympathy with a race that goes about glorifying itself to the exclusion of all others, and wants to be master of the world by fair means or foul. But the forceful energy of the German people, and the manner in which it is organised and applied—one can't help admiring that.'

The little Captain shrugged his shoulders, and made no answer.

Far ahead on the road two little points of light appeared, coming rapidly nearer. Then came a peremptory hoot from a motor horn, and the car with the Divisional Staff rushed down on them at a furious pace, the column opening right and left to let it pass. The medical officer and the head of the supplies stood like pillars, one on either side. The wheels sent up a shower of liquid mud, spattering it fairly and abundantly over the ranks on either hand. Leaning back in the car sat his Excellency himself, with two fingers carelessly touching his cap in acknowledgment, every inch of him a monarch restored to his own.

The men brushed the mud from their clothes and faces, gazed for a moment in naïve admiration after the wonderful thing of speed as it vanished down the road. Then, facing about once more, they trudged happily on to their quarters.

CHAPTER XV

The Germans are coming! The news ran like wildfire along the line, leaping from point to point and licking its way down the trenches. It came like a blare of trumpets to the men on the fighting front, as they sat huddled up in their dug-outs, holding this little section or that against the enemy with the silent obstinacy of despair. It rang like a shout of triumph in the ears of those who had still some energy and will-power left; and loosed the accumulated fury of the winter months. And it cracked like the lash of a whip over the heads of the fainthearted, whose brain and nerve had dwindled and shrunk. The Germans are coming! . . .

Here, in the Waldgebirge, the united force of the Austrian people rose up once more. Once more the thousands of mud-bespattered men, sunk almost to the level of the beast, began to realise that a miserable death in the trenches is not the only fate before them. The white clouds sailing towards the north shone like bright banners. The cry of the titmouse, the twittering of finches, the hammering of woodpeckers in the newly verdant woods, the carolling of the lark in the mellow air, all rang with a glad note of confidence and hope. The finger of spring pointed out over the trampled, harried land that lay spread out in front of the forests, and cried: 'On, and win it back again.' And at the rear, where the staff sat worrying themselves to death in a mesh of varied embarrassments—ever since the fall of the great fortress, the enemy had thrown wave after wave of men in floods against the wall of the defence where the staffs sat pondering and calculating, drawing circles and cracking the whip of command at hazard—there, too, the news waked a light in eyes dulled with thought, and the furrowed brows looked up in relief. The word swept like a storm through their bundles of papers—the Germans are coming !

And meanwhile, the close, heavy columns are already tramping through the land, pushing on over the roads towards the mountains, occupying villages, and rolling themselves up like hedgehogs with spines thrusting all ways at once. And a thunder of work goes with them. Orders are flung out ; clear, sharp, decisive. All the country is alive and busy as an ant-heap in restless activity; obstinate, imperturbable and sure. The landscape now is stern and firmly set ; there is no longer that soft, deathly melancholy, no vagueness, no weak indecision. No ! The countryside wears a casque of steel, heavier than it had ever borne before ; and breastplate and greaves and links to hold that armour firmly in place. The swarming ants make roads where no roads were—roads hard and smooth, leading up to the mountain heights, and along them creep the colossal guns, drawn by huge beasts. Guns, and ever more guns, day and night. They sink into the earth—they are bigger and more numerous than before. Behind the green veil of the woods, axes are at work, and pick and spade, and soon the monsters are in place, ready and waiting.

And the great yellow birds fly abroad to spy out the land. Fives and tens, whole flocks of them, with a hum and whir that resounds all over the Waldgebirge. Beyond, they dive deep into the blue of the sky, and presently return, laden with clear, concise information of the enemy's dispositions, all to be stored for use in the cold prudent brains that direct the operations from the rear. The knowledge gathered grows to power, and gives birth to definite commands. No more groping and vague guesswork, no more hints as to the possibility of attacking to-morrow, but knowledge, decision, and action.

The quondam Brigadier does not altogether like the new state of things ; the atmosphere does not suit him. This hurricane from the north is threatening to upset him, and whirl him off into all the varied perils of a swift advance. The methodical holding on, in which he had excelled, is no longer sufficient, it seems. A pity!

No, the new order does not suit him. He sits sorrowfully regarding his microphones, and wondering where it will end. Then one night a sudden lightning flashes down over the Waldgebirge, runs along the trenches, flickers above the batteries. Attack! And in the morning a roar goes up from the world about.

The air is filled with a furious howling and shrieking, such as had never before been heard on earth. The forests stand as if turned to stone under a ceaseless wailing and thundering—the heavy guns are preparing the way for the new offensive. And over there on the other side, where the enemy sits in his huge defences, there is a bursting of shells, a crashing and rending and shivering. . . . On every side high columns of black dust are flung up from the ground; whole ranks of men whirling and dancing. And as they collapse, lo, already others have sprung up from where they came! Corrosive vapours drift along, clinging to breastwork and trench, and the stoical peasants, the sons of mighty Russia, die they know not how! . . . The Germans have come!

. . . .

Major Blagorski was just reading out to the assembled company commanders three new and strictly confidential orders from the Division command, and purposed thereafter to supplement them with explanations furnished by the Colonel according to his own lights. The Major had already settled his glasses on his nose, and commenced to dilate upon the particular views held by the Colonel regarding Point I. in the special direction for fighting in wooded country. 'The Colonel, gentlemen, wishes particularly to point out, in the first place, that the different detachments must throughout keep in close touch one with another. The strictest precautions . . .' There was a knock at the door. 'Come in, man, come in,' said the Major impatiently.

The door opened, and a gigantic figure seemed to grow up in the room. The figure hesitated a moment, uncovered a close-cropped head, and steered directly for the Major himself. Then it clicked its heels together and stood motionless, and far up in the air, from under a toothbrush of a moustache, came a snarl: 'Captain von Schmellenthin, of the 334th Royal Prussian Infantry, has the honour to report his arrival in cantonments with a battalion.'

'Very pleased to meet you, comrade,' said the Major. 'Won't you sit down ?' He drew out a chair, and laid his glasses and the papers aside.

The imposing figure clicked its heels together sharply once more, and made a slight inclination of the upper part of the body towards Crlenjak, Grill, and Zillner. 'Von Schmellenthin!' Then he sat down.

The Major pulled out his cigarette case and offered it. 'Will you smoke ?'

'Many thanks,' said the Prussian, and clicked his heels.

Grill inquired politely where their new comrade had been serving hitherto.

'In France. They 've sent us over now to clear up some of the muddle on this side,' said the giant airily.

The Major cleared his throat. 'Pardon me, Captain, there is no muddle on this side. The position here is difficult, very difficult. We have held out all through the winter—more than three months.'

The giant bowed slightly as if accepting the amendment. 'Yes, yes, of course,' he murmured, and, leaning back, blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. 'But we must push on now, and go for them thoroughly. The new offensive . . .'

Crlenjak filled a small glass from a bottle on the table. 'The local poison, comrade, if you 'd care to try it.'

The Prussian lifted the glass on high and emptied it at a draught. 'All helps the circulation. Thanks.' He clicked his heels together again. 'The offensive, I was about to say, will be carried out in earnest this time. First pulverise them small with shells, and then go in and settle them out of hand.'

Grill looked at the newcomer curiously. 'Our men are rather done up,' he said. 'I 'm afraid there 's not much kick in them now.'

'Really? My fellows are like children; like simple little children, I assure you. I only have to say: "Now then, lads, at them and give it them hot"—and they 'll go anywhere.'

'Sounds very nice,' said Grill. 'Theoretically, of course, it 's what they ought to do. But when men are worn out, how are you going to get them to do it?'

'It doesn't much matter how it 's done—as long as it 's done. We know what they 've got to do, and it 's our business to see that they do it. This time there must be no mistake.'

Grill filled the glasses again, and lifted his own. 'Allow me, sir,' he said politely, 'to express my satisfaction at being called upon to fight side by side with your countrymen.'

The Prussian bowed. 'Very kind of you, I 'm sure.' Then lifting his glass, and showing his white teeth under the toothbrush moustache, he cried: 'Here 's to the coming victory! To brave hearts and good comradeship. Major, your servant!'

The Major blinked in some embarrassment, trying hard to appear cordial. 'We 're all very happy, I 'm sure, to—er—shoulder to shoulder. . . .'

'And victory to victory—if God wills it so—and He will!' said the giant decisively.

'Let us hope so,' said the Major, who did not seem so certain of the Almighty's intentions.

'*Donnerwetter ja!*' The big man rose to his feet with a sudden movement. 'An excellent liqueur that—thanks very much. And now, Major, if you will excuse me, I had better get along and see how my fellows are doing in their new quarters. *Auf Wiedersehen!'* He shook hands, and then, with a jerk of the body, a click of the heels, the visitor from the north strode off, a tall, upright, heavy figure, too big for the little low room.

The withered mannikin looked after the retreating giant with a frown. 'H'm—a Prussian. Not a companionable sort, and talks too much. . . . I don't know . . .'

'He 's not an attractive type,' said the Major. 'Thinks a little too much of himself, perhaps.'

Zillner said nothing. His thoughts were far away from the war and his surroundings, busied with the memory of a girl.

But Grill, who was cold and calculating as a rule, and very careful of what he said to a superior, broke in warmly: 'Why, sir, as for being attractive—men of forceful character rarely are. The voice of Germany speaks through this one man, as through every one of his countrymen. He would not be a Prussian if he spoke otherwise. They are born conquerors; able, unscrupulous, accustomed to trample down all resistance. They cannot be attractive to others; it would be unnatural if they were. We have adopted a friendly tone towards all the world, and we have done nothing but lose ground for more than half a century. What have we gained by it at all? A pitying, condescending smile, and some compliments from the world of fashion and the theatres. That 's all we get by being inoffensive. Nothing more. We are a weak-kneed lot, and they are men. I might be the same if I could be born again among them. No, any one who likes can be attractive—I 'd rather be strong. You 're not offended, sir?'

The Major waved his hand. 'Not at all, not at all. What you say 's perfectly right. But I certainly think they are a little—what shall I say—a little too harsh in their manner. Yes, harsh. . . .'

To Zillner's surprise, Grill contradicted once more.

'For us Southerners, yes, perhaps. But they are so astonishingly capable that we must forgive them their roughness of manner. And then, as a nation—not only the people themselves are capable, but their leaders—that is the most impressive thing of all. From the lowest to the highest.'

'What about their diplomatists?' put in Zillner.

'Well, in their preparations for this war, they certainly showed themselves a poor lot—almost as poor as our own. But Germany will get over that. Whereas we . . .'

'We will get back to business,' said the Major in an altered voice. 'Note what I say attentively, gentlemen, please. We never know how soon the occasion may arise. With regard to fighting in wooded country, the Colonel further points out . . .'

The Major had the satisfaction of having, by his tactful intervention, crushed any possibly unpleasant discussion as to the respective merits of the two nations in the bud.

. . . .

The artillery duel had lasted three days and nights. The Russians were to be hammered thoroughly before the bayonets were sent in to finish them off. Ruthlessly, systematically, the guns thundered; death was hard pressed to gather in the enormous harvest. And the great Butcher, with his best blue apron on, smiled calmly down over the shell-torn ground.

The masses of infantry lay pressed close in to the breastworks of the trenches; the men stared up at the sky, judging from the noise what was coming—perhaps a common shell, or perhaps one of the heavier beasts that flew with a duller note, or one of the very biggest, that hummed like a great bee, with a deep bass, the terrible giant bombs that seemed as if they must pierce to the centre of the earth.

The men munched their bread and smoked, and died like cattle, with a dull grunt, when a direct hit smashed their defences to atoms. Many there were, too, who staggered back to the rear, or were carried off to the dressing stations in the villages, dreadfully mutilated, groaning, bleeding, and grey with pain and dirt. Often one might see men on carts, or hobbling down on foot from the hills, to all appearance unhurt, but with eyes dulled, like blind mirrors. They seemed unconscious of all around them, and, if questioned, made no answer beyond a sullen stare—deaf and dumb, witless, paralysed with terror, mowed down by the shock of the bursting shells!

The Tiefenbachers were fairly comfortably off during those days, being in reserve. They could sit huddled up deep down in the second line trenches, and it was but rarely that the high columns of earth sprang up where they were. Zillner's company even went to a funeral one day, almost as if it had been peace time—save that there were fifty corpses to be carried to one common grave. Fifty men who had died of wounds, at the dressing station, and were now packed away in tiers, five deep. . . . The uppermost row lay with upturned faces staring uncomprehensively at the gestures of a red-bearded Capuchin pater above the grave, until suddenly—surely a scornful smile flickered over their yellow faces?—a shell came rushing over towards the battery close by. A whistling and whining in the air. '*Requiescant in pa-ha* . . .' The priest came to a stop. Thank heaven!—the shell had passed over. And he began again: '*Requiescant in pa-ha-ha-ce.*' . . . Then earth on the scornful faces, one more trembling sign of the cross, and then back, as quickly as possible to the Division Headquarters, where there were no shells.

'I'm sick and tired of this miserable foolery,' said Zillner to his subaltern, as they walked back. 'Why can't they just bury the poor fellows with a few green twigs or a handful of flowers on the grave. Of all the disgusting scenes one has to see these days, I do think that figure of the priest with his fire and brimstone is the worst.'

Lewit waved one hand deprecatingly. 'It 's the custom,' he said. 'Can hardly get away from it. Sort of—what shall I say—settlement. Most people wouldn't like to see it done away with.'

'Ah, most people,' cried Zillner. 'Most people. . . . No, let us gather buds and flowers, little kindly flowers, to lay on the eyes and foreheads of the dead. It would be a better thing than the hollow alien patter of a churchman. And we should think of them, find room in our heart for each one, and make a vow; not to forget them, the nameless ones, the victims of a bestial time, but to teach those who come after us never again to suffer their fellows to be slaughtered like beasts. Ay, till they wake and shout in the ears of the leaders and rulers, "We are human beings, and not cattle to be slaughtered. Woe to you if you will not heed." Yes—that should be their requiem.'

Lewit glanced sideways at him, and noted with astonishment that his captain appeared altogether lacking in military ideals. But it is the business of a draper to make himself agreeable to people without regard to what he may think privately. And he merely said: 'Yes, it is sad that so many should die in vain! Makes one feel dismal to think of it.'

Zillner did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the sunset, and his thoughts wandered in a red emptiness through the wide world.

. . . .

And the northern gale swept over the Waldgebirge, cold and keen, a wind that brooked no delay—no longer fluttering out from right and left in fitful gusts, no longer dropping every now and then to an asthmatic wheeze. It was the northern gale, and it threw down forests and tore up the ground, till the earth shuddered in fear. Terror flew on ahead of it like heavy showers of hail. 'General attack!' sang the northern gale. 'Make ready. They shall be exterminated in their earths, the burrowing fools that still dare to resist.

They shall be scattered abroad like chaff. . . . Make ready!'

The men in the first line of trenches bowed beneath its breath, and gathered themselves for a mighty leap. And those behind in reserve spread themselves out into thin fluttering ribbons and rolled forward, lashed by its fury, towards the slopes of the hills. Six, eight lines, one behind another, miles long, and kilometres deep. And the northern gale caught up the General Staff and whirled it away on wings. The quondam Brigadier and the pseudo-energetics, with their hard faces and their little brains, the thoughtless sacrificers—it gripped them all, and they could not break away. And the *kaiserl. und königl.* hailstorms, which had so often drizzled weakly down and missed their aim, were gathered now into a mighty cloud that swept over the mountains, to help the north wind crush and trample down all that stood in its way. A vapour of blood drove before it, with vomitings and groans. But there was also a rustling in the treetops. Thus it was with the northern gale!

. . . .

'Gentlemen!' Major Blagorski had assembled his company commanders in front of the trenches, and his worn, furrowed face was alight with new youth and new courage. 'Gentlemen, this time we are to go into action in the midst of our German comrades. I need not say more. We have always stood our ground and borne ourselves like brave men, all. . . .' He swallowed something in his throat, and his voice grew hoarse. 'And we will now, as soldiers of the Austrian army, win for ourselves an honourable . . . an honourable . . . Gentlemen, I need not say more. . . . Ah, the Colonel is beckoning this way, I think. Quickly to your posts, gentlemen, if you please.'

'We will!' cried little Captain Crlenjak. And his eyes were moist as he saluted and turned about.

The Major glanced uneasily at the Colonel, who was standing on a mound close by, beckoning with a nervous hand. 'Advance. Companies One and Two in the firing line, the reserve in rear of the centre.' The old man's soldierly face had once more assumed its wonted expression of anxious and deferential humility.

Forward, over the tiny field flowers, over ploughland and trampled grass, the first battalion of the Tiefenbachers came at the double, up into the endlessly extended ribbon of the firing line. A grain of sand among the breakers, nothing more, yet with a thousand glowing lives, a thousand beating hearts. And even though the Major had not finished his speech, even though his words had been faltering and his voice hoarse, yet every man had understood. They had stood their ground, through frost and heat, in the filthy, inadequate shelter of the trenches, at the mercy of criminally inadequate leaders; and they would do the same to-day, under the eyes of the haughty Prussians.

Little Captain Crlenjak looked fiercer than usual hurrying along on his thin legs, murmuring to himself, and snipping off flowers from their stalks with his cane as he went. Once he turned to look back, and caught sight of the Major striding on likewise. 'Ah, yes,' he thought to himself, 'we old men. . . .'

Zillner had not a single clear thought in his head. He walked as if the force of gravity no longer affected him. He attended mechanically to what he had to do, but felt nothing, and the monstrous orgy of self-destruction that was to come, the gigantic collision of hundreds of thousands of human beings, seemed to melt away in his soul.

Grill circled round his men like a shepherd dog, snapping at them threateningly wherever he discerned a baser instinct not yet properly subdued.

The northern gale drove hundreds of thousands of German helmets and Austrian caps towards the Waldgebirge. They came to the first line, and tore the soldiers there from their holes, to be swept forward with them in endless ribbons, on and on . . . right up to the battered and shattered ruins of the Russian defences.

Here they were met by a furious fire, in which the first lines disappeared. The rest, bleeding and shaken, strove to push on. 'On!' cried the northern gale. 'There is no other way!' Column after column was dispersed, but there was no pause; ever more and more came pouring out from the dark woods. That hill there—up and take it, at any cost!'

The Collaltos are being drained of their blood on the slopes. Karl Albert Kraft, sometime idealist, is now a shapeless mass of stuff—struck directly by a shell. He will cheer for Germany no more. But what is Karl Albert Kraft?—what is the whole regiment of the Collaltos? A new regiment to the front, to find a foothold there among the dead. And that, too, is shattered to pieces. Another, and yet another. The hill must be taken—at any cost! It is the key to a great position—forward, and up, all that have life in them still! Thus the gale rages, and the masses obey. Ever new bodies of men are whirled forward up the slopes, spread out and cover the ground, swarm up to the top with bayonets like a gleaming white foam in front. Heavy, redly breaking waves. . . . Then a cheer, the last of the barbed-wire is down, and a couple of hundred men out of all those hordes are chosen by blind chance to stand on the summit as victors. Breathless they are, and drunk with blood. And they give thanks to the great Butcher, as he wipes his knife on his sky-blue apron. Enough for to-day! Let them be crowned with laurel! . . .

Swarms of flies hover about the piled up corpses on the slopes. Save for the insects, they lie there unheeded.

. . . .

The whole country was carpeted with blood. Thousands and thousands rolled over it. It seemed hard to believe that these moving masses had once been human beings with feeling hearts. This thing that pressed on and on through forest and swamp leaped across rivers, and rushed with fierce noises up the sides of mountains, was a horde of destructive organisms, driven forward by the mechanism of compulsion and necessity. Thumping and shrieking locomotives, hurrying in endless numbers along the same line of rails, moving undeviatingly forward till the clockwork in them stopped. What was any single one of them to the whole ? Ask the sea of the drops that evaporate and are lost. So they vanished, thousands and thousands of them, unthanked, unnoticed. Only where they lay piled in grey mounds, broken and torn to rags and trampled down, there the eyes of those who yet remained upright glanced at them hurriedly, without pity, and looked away.

The Russians fled, but only to positions already prepared for the event. And time after time they offered heroic resistance. For weeks the same scene was repeated—first a thorough artillery preparation, then massed charges of the infantry, that were thrown forward like cattle to the slaughter.

The Tiefenbachers were reduced to a fraction of their strength, as were the best of the Imperial regiments. Landwehr and Hungarian Honveds dwindled to mere skeletons. In the brave Landsturm regiments, husbands and fathers whose hair was tinged with grey joined in the dance of death with a wild abandon not surpassed by the nineteen-year-old boys. The flower of the German army, the Guard, faded and drooped. And wherever any untimely desire to live became apparent, as in many of the Czech and Ruthenian units, where the men cast longing glances toward the rear, the German taskmasters swooped down ruthlessly : ‘ Forward, you dogs ! ’ And it was in vain to struggle against the power of the northern gale, and even the most unwilling were driven helplessly on before it. And so it happened that the willingness of the masses to die resulted not only in the recapture of the fortress, which had shortly before capitulated owing to a scandal about the stores of provisions, but also freed the capital, and drove the enemy back across the border.

The iron-throated song-birds of the daily press, sitting far back along the lines of communication, evolved new superlatives, and the General Staff suddenly recollected its own importance. Zapperer drew forth from his store of theatrical properties the mask that had been so roughly handled the year before: 'Napoleon on the march into Russia.' And it suited him now very well.

But over the graves of the nameless ones strode the figure of Fame, pointing eloquently to the future.

. . . .

The Tiefenbachers marched through the desolate country, harassed and trampled now for the fifth time. Once more the flames rose high above burning villages, but there were not so many now to burn. Only those that had by some chance been spared hitherto could give fresh fuel now. It was a melancholy display of pyrotechnics. The greasy priests, too, no longer stood blinking cunningly outside their churches—the buildings were in ruins, and their ministers were gone. Some followed in the train of the Russian armies, others had found a lodging in Austrian prisons, or, as the most suitable for many of those orthodox traitors, had been strung up under the treetops, with a thin cord about their unwashed necks. And alas, no welcome greeted the troops as they passed through the villages, no outburst of acclamation surged round the columns from the lands they had set free. Only old men and women gathered listlessly in their doorways, and uncared-for children scrambled spider-legged about among the ruined heaps. Swollen corpses of dead horses lay in the ditches . . . it was the old familiar scene.

Horrors had grown so commonplace that men no longer seemed to notice anything. Even Zillner himself remained unmoved. He rode at the rear of his company, as it dragged on with weary steps, rendered unfeeling by sheer monotony of dreadful things. The men on the staffs in the rear were rejoicing over a victory; the people behind them again lifted their heads once more, and a timorous wave of joy swept through the country. At last—at last! Thanks to God and the Germans!

Zillner, the victorious, felt now no voice within, no impulse to resist, no solemn conflict in himself. Only when his eyes chanced to wander over the shrunken little flock that had been his company, the ragged and filthy pariahs of war's renown, could he feel a thrill of furious anger against those who sat comfortably at a distance weaving their laurel wreaths. At such times he could think with a wild pain of the future, where those who had been but day-labourers in the service of death would be treated to the words and phrases of hero-worship spoken by eminent liars above the silent pits where men lay heaped together in a common burial. He thought of the writers who would celebrate these charges of cattle driven to the slaughter in heroic epics, full of thrilling pathos and wordy splendour . . . touching, edifying, freed from all coarser elements, and thus fulfilling that æsthetic law which insists that the beauty-loving soul can find no delight in contemplation of the vulgar and obscene. The pleasing lie would plaster up even these inordinate massacres, and ready eloquence raise monuments to those who sacrificed the blood of the nameless that their own names might become immortal. And Sarapatka and his fellows, the venal enthusiasts of the lampshade and the writing desk, would place their talents at the service of infamy, that the offspring of the masses might be led on anew upon the same murderous road.

Zillner gazed with helpless affection at the lines of stooping-shouldered men, whose bodies gave forth a rank smell of sweat and foul linen. These simple folk, dumb and blind—when would a Saviour arise to loose their tongues and make their eyes to see? He that died upon the cross for their sake, alas, He too had become a servant of the mighty ones of earth. He was not the man. So Zillner, loving and respecting the common people, was melancholy now despite the victory, despite the northern gale that had raged over the great graveyard.

Crlenjak, the mannikin, on the other hand, seemed rejuvenated ; the more he was tanned by sun and wind and rain, the more his aged body was bowed under the continuous exertion, the stronger grew his confidence and hope. ‘ I tell you what, brother, they ’re nearly at their last gasp now. And it wasn’t the Prussians alone that did it—we were as good as they, every bit.’ He said the same thing every day, looking at Grill and Zillner as if challenging them to confute him. But neither of them took up the gauntlet, and the little man triumphed at their silence.

Early that summer the columns crossed the Russian frontier. But Zillner’s fate decided that he had had enough, and bade him halt.

It happened late one afternoon, when the advance came in touch with the Russian rearguard. A shrapnel was the instrument chosen, and it did its work well, shattering his right thigh. And he lay on his back in the grass and saw his mother’s face bending over him—saw it quite clearly, as she stopped to lift him up. And he was glad. Then the vision faded, with all else, into a thin silvery mist.

CHAPTER XVI

In the shadowy days that followed, there was but little that laid hold of Zillner's mind. All things seemed hovering, floating and flowing out into the infinite. Colours bloomed out from a grey mist . . . sounds of music very far away. . . . A veil hid all things from his sight, and he lay beneath it, listening unheedingly to the confusion of the world. He had lost a great deal of blood, and felt a strange lightness, as if he had no body at all; he seemed to himself like the centre of whirling circles—the one point at rest while all else was in a flurry of motion. He was freed, protected, unassailable. How long had he lain thus? He did not know and did not care.

Then a harsh voice came trampling into his peace. He heard it so distinctly, it cut through his protecting veil, and went like a sharp knife to his brain. 'The leg must be taken off, my dear sir. You *may* save his life, if you amputate at once. Even then . . .'

Zillner felt a sudden anger at this. Who was this man who talked so carelessly about taking off his leg—what right had he to give orders at all? He strove to see, but his eyes refused. All things were veiled . . . veiled . . . . Then there was a smell; sweet, sickly—take it away! And huge grey suns whirling towards him. He would resist—he would not submit to this. But the world was shrinking all about him, dwindling to a column of figures. And he counted involuntarily, furious all the time with some unknown power that forced him to keep on counting . . . counting. . . One—two—three —and up to ten. Then a vast emptiness laid hold of him, and he sank blissfully exhausted into its embrace.

. . . .

Then lying in a bed, groping about in a twilight full of floating stars and wandering sounds . . . and waking to consciousness at last. His mouth was clogged with something that had a sickly taste, and iron bars were crushing his head; they seemed to be fastened over the brow, and tightened with screws at the back of his neck. He sighed, and strove to open his eyes—helpless again! The eyelids had been closed, it seemed, with leaden weights. What was the matter? He was not ill? He set his teeth hard, and strove to wrench his eyelids apart. And then he saw.

A white figure stood beside him, soft and tall, and bending slightly down. With a gentle face. Cool hands glided over his forehead, and took him carefully under the shoulders and lifted him up. . . . Nausea . . . a terrible fit of vomiting that shook his whole frame . . . then cool hands holding him again, laying his head gently back upon the pillow. He felt weak now, but the iron bars about his head were gone, and the veils had disappeared. He looked over to a row of beds on the other side of the room . . . saw the sunlight flooding in through the windows. . . .

The nurse was still bending over him, touching his forehead with a wet cloth. He looked up at her face; the homely features softened to a smile. 'Don't worry—it was only the anæsthetic. The worst is over now. Lie still and try to sleep.'

He stammered helplessly. 'And . . . and I shall soon be all right again?'

'Soon, yes, it won't be very long,' she said softly.

He felt at the coverlet; there was a queer burning pain in his right foot, at the toes. He could not reach so far, and gripped at his knee to draw it up, but the bedclothes gave under his hand, and collapsed into flat folds. He felt about . . . there was nothing there.

'But what . . . where . . .' Hastily he felt his left leg; there it was, of course. Then what. . . . 'Sister, sister, what is it?' His voice was a cry. 'I can feel my leg; my foot; it hurts—but it's not there.'

The nurse looked at him and glanced away. ‘Captain, you ’ve borne it so bravely up to now—you mustn’t . . .’

‘Yes, but where . . . ? what has happened ? . . . My leg. . . .’

The nurse did not speak, but stood looking out into the sunlight.

Zillner buried his face in the pillow and sobbed. He felt the convulsion shaking his whole body—yes, *both* his legs, down to the feet, answered nervously to his questioning sense. But when he stretched out his hand again to the right knee he found his fingers closing over the stiffly bandaged stump. . . .

The nurse had gone. For hours he lay without a word, staring out at the frame of the window opposite. Then, later in the afternoon, as the fever increased, he had a pleasant surprise. His mother came to see him. And he saw her dear old face and heard her voice : ‘You are spared, dear boy, you are alive ! And I am with you now. What does it matter about the leg, as long as you are alive ? ’ ‘Yes, but mother, I shall have to hobble about on crutches, and all my dreams—all nothing ! The girl I was to . . . she will have nothing but pity for a cripple. Her heart will turn toward the men who are whole and strong. O mother, mother ! ’ And the dead mother he loved stroked his burning forehead, with hands so soft and gentle, like no others in the world. ‘If she does that,’ she said, ‘then she did not love you. But you are alive ! ’

And he smiled, as at a happy dream, and the Sister with the plain, kindly face, coming in softly with some soothing medicine, was pleased. ‘He will get over it,’ she thought. He took the powder, and felt that he was sweating violently ; then he fell into an easy, quiet sleep. The vision of the dead woman faded, glided silently away, and was gone. But when the line of the fever chart rose again, she would return. Those were Zillner’s happiest hours. His forehead was dry and hot. But she came gliding towards him, the only woman in the world, and near and dear to him now as years ago . . . sat by his side and talked with him in love from beyond the grave. It was through her alone that he found courage to live, despite the powders that showed him only misery in health. Day after day for many days, she came. But each time her stay was shorter, and at last she ceased to come at all. Then they gave him chicken, bread, and wine, and said he was convalescent. So perhaps she knew that he did not need her any more.

. . . .

And then one day, with the midsummer sun blazing outside, he got up. Nice dark crutches with rubber tips and padded shoulder pieces to support him. He stumped along the row of beds, slowly and awkwardly, and the other patients, still humbly confined to their beds, watched him and cried: 'Bravo—getting on finely!'

And the Sister was quite flushed with sympathy and pleasure. 'Why, you 're doing splendidly,' she said.

'Circus tricks,' he murmured, 'hopping about on one leg. . . .'

But the Sister clapped her hands as he swung himself forward in long, gliding movements down the centre of the room. 'Couldn't be better!' she cried.

Zillner sat down, pale with exertion. 'Enough for to-day.' The stump of his leg was aching and throbbing —and all the time he felt so distinctly as if all that was needed was to step out firmly with the missing foot. He could feel every toe in it still.

Gradually he gained strength. The muscles of his arms grew accustomed to the work, and his left leg willingly took over its extra share. He was getting into training; each day a few minutes longer, a few yards farther. And the day when he first tried his way down the polished stone steps to the garden was a little triumph in itself.

The sun hung in the dark heavy green of the summer-clad trees, and drew rings and spots of light on the gravel paths. He looked at it in a glad surprise, as at a new possession—something exclusively his own. He noted the bees and butterflies as they flew, and was glad at that—he saw them again after all. The buzz of insects gave him a warm thrill of joy to hear. And so he made his way, slowly, down the garden walks.

On the farther side of the garden, where a long row of houses stretched away in the sunlight, flags were hung out. Black-and-yellow, red-and-white, and black-red-and-white thrust out from attic windows and waving over the roofs, a blare of colour in the blaze of the sun.

Zillner sat down on a seat, and opened the morning paper. There it was, in heavy type! 'Fall of Warsaw. Warsaw in our hands.' And underneath, in smaller letters and different styles of type, were minor headlines, arranged with all the effect that typographical assortment can lend to the work of serving up events in a worthy style. The paper had paraded in full strength. The matter itself was wreathed and garlanded about with words, as with roses and laurel. It was as if the editor in chief had given special orders to his staff to throw the last reserves of their ardour into the rotary press, and pour in adjectives and metaphors by the bucketful, remembering that it was a great occasion, which would give them a chance to increase their circulation. There was the competition to be considered; it would not do to be left behind in the triumphal march, and come up with drooping colours in the rear. Zillner read the leading article and the special correspondence with a strange delight. It was journalism let loose, with none of the galling reserve that had been so evident before. Only the little black flags stuck about coquettishly gave a different note: 'Fallen on the northern front' . . . 'Fallen during operations in the south,' . . . like little memorial brasses. Specialists in elegy paragraphed briefly and expressively the loss of this or that popular hero. The official *communiqués* were laconic in the extreme—now, with the armies really making progress, there was no need for the many explanatory comments. Enormous columns of figures—the numbers of prisoners taken—marched past in sharply cut sentences, and the reports from the front were built on solid foundations of Russian corpses numbered by the thousand. The citizens might rejoice; here was all that the most patriotic heart could desire, set forth in correct and methodical order. Warsaw taken by storm, ideal leadership, heroes, mountains of dead, prisoners, and so on!

Zillner laid the paper down. His soul refused to fire up in enthusiasm at the bidding of the carefully chosen phrases, but he looked at the flags, and was glad. Those symbols of the people's strength, black-and-white, red-and-white, to his mind they waved in honour of the nameless, common men, whose willingness to die had a quality of mysticism in the monstrous crime against humanity by which they had fallen. To his mind, they waved above the graves of unknown heroes whose martyrdom should pave the way to banishment for the atrocity of war. . . . Ay, first strew their graves richly with flowers, and then, let all strong arms be lifted towards heaven, and all sound minds unite in a confession that should ring with one voice through all the earth: 'We will be men henceforth, not cattle for the slaughter.' Yes, that must be the end of wars now, for all time. So he thought, as he rose, and, inspired by his dreams, made his way rapidly along the path.

He moved with lifted head over the spots of sunlight on the shady walks, weaving golden dreams . . . golden dreams! . . .

And in his joy at life thus regained, in his rejoicing over the sun that watched and guarded all its little ones—the fruits with their ripening juices, the tiny insects humming with vitality in the noonday heat, creatures with six legs and those with four, and most of all those with two—all humming together in a midsummer chorus of rejoicing—Zillner felt that he, too, must join in.

Join in!—and he a cripple? But what matter? Had he not a warm heart, and the strength of youth? And had he not now for months borne with him through the chambers of hell the image of a bright-eyed girl? Early that spring . . . yes, it was long ago now. He had never heard from her since, but the perfume of their gentle meeting, the wordless intuition that had filled him then, still hung about him. And as he gradually emerged from the ghostly twilight of sickness, and from the thought of his own disaster, and could declare for life in spite of all, he felt more and more intensely the need to find and see her once more, this girl whom he could not forget. But how? How was he to find her? He sat under the deep-green trees, pondering ways and means, and drawing figures on the gravel with his crutch.

He would not go to see her at the hospital. Should he write? He felt a kind of shame at the thought of thus seeking her out and bringing himself before her again, now that he was as he was. How could he ask her to look on it—she who was whole and fresh and strong? No—he could not do it. He could imagine how it would be; she would look at him, and see what had happened, and start in surprise—then she would say some words of pity—and then walk on beside him, always with side-long glances at his disfigurement. For after all—good and sweet as she was, she was still a woman . . . and he a man who could never be seen without his crutches, whom one could only look upon with pity . . . pity! . . . No! It would be unbearable. Better never to see her again at all!

When he thought thus, all the bitterness of his shipwreck rose up in him. He cursed the smooth tiny ripples on the sea of life over which his happier fellows could so gaily dance. And when one of them passed him, a comrade, walking easily and confidently upon his two sound legs, a horrible envy gripped him. He would stand watching, with clenched teeth, noting every movement, all the ordered and effective play of muscle and sinew—a runner, able to enter for the course of life, a favourite in the race—while he himself . . .

was scratched at the last moment. He—he, to be out of it all! He clenched his fists at the blind goddess of fate: what had he done that this should be his lot? . . . But as he stumped forward again along the gravel path, a ray of comfort came to him, came with the sunbeams, down through the dark trees that rose towering towards the sky. She was not like the rest. She could not be. She would look on him as she had done in the spring. As she had done then. . . . She would not even notice what had happened—or, better, she would look on it as something utterly immaterial, since he himself was unchanged. There was a rustling in the branches of the old trees, and the sunflecked shadows danced—a foretaste of joy, of happiness to come. . . .

But as he thus groped back and forth between light and gloom, seeking for the narrow and difficult path to the open, a woman watched him from the high windows of the hospital corridor—the Sister with the homely face that had no beauty to draw men's looks. Often she stood there, watching his slender figure with sorrowful eyes, and feeling herself so hopelessly alone. How quickly he was recovering, he could get about unaided already. . . . Yes, she was glad of it . . . with a sharp pain ever at her heart. He did not see her—he would never see her. . . . Then she would go back, with the quiet smile of the unwanted, to her work; to the operating-table, and the wards, to help and nurse and comfort and be kind.

. . . .

Zillner pondered for days, and his longing grew. How would he meet her? By accident it must be, of course. At any rate it must seem so—she must not think that he had sought her out. And then he could see at the first glance how she took it. He would observe dispassionately, and see what her glance said, and then . . . happiness, or . . . but no, she could not be like that . . . she . . .

Early one afternoon he could bear it no longer; he must go out. He put on a new uniform and hobbled out, his crutches tapping, first on the pavement of the little suburban streets, and then along the promenade under the trees of the Ring. People noticed him, and made way for him to pass—a little too markedly, he thought. Many looked at him in evident pity; the women especially with eyes full of tender sympathy. 'Poor, poor fellow!' they seemed to say. And it jarred on him almost to anger. He walked on, looking straight before him, and trying not to meet the glance of those who passed.

The streets were full of life. There were many children, holding their mother's or their nurse's hand. And elderly men who seemed to be thinking: 'What did I tell you? Thank Heaven, I am well out of it myself!' Youths shambling along with an important air—aged seventeen, and, if not soldiers yet, they would be very soon, and demanded respect in advance. Young men were nowhere to be seen, and even the middle-aged paterfamilias was but sparsely represented. But it did not seem to make any difference after all. Here and there a woman in mourning; a black veil fluttering through the crowd seemed the expression of a hopeless sorrow that only asked to be left in peace.

But these were the exceptions, and life passed over them unheeding; some were delirious with the fever heat of victory; others had grown accustomed to the war, and took things cheerfully in the old way. Vienna is a careless beauty, and does not care for doleful faces. If sacrifices were demanded—*c'est la guerre.* And no reason to make oneself miserable for that. As long as one could keep out of it oneself. The streets rang with loud placards announcing concerts, theatres, copper and brass collection days. There was always an element of amusement even in these. The veriest pessimists and croakers had changed their tone, as the tavern-keepers could witness. They talked loudly of Petrograd as a trump card, and of settling the Russians that way—it could easily be done if only one went the right way to work. They arranged it all most neatly, drinking much wine—vintage 1914 was not so bad after all—in a spirit of cheerful confidence, which lasted till the next reverse. No, Vienna was not depressed. Those who were dying out there for their country, and those who were in training for the same in the crowded barracks could not silence the orchestra that played so jubilantly under the sun's direction: 'Victory!' The daily press supplied the double bass: '*Evoe*, victory!' and the General Staff reports gave a leading solo: 'It should be observed . . . on the one hand . . . while on the other hand . . .' And so on.

Zillner hobbled along with the crowd, searching about for a slender woman in a black dress. And wherever he caught sight of a Red Cross cloak he thought, 'Perhaps it is she!'

Portraits of stern-faced German generals appeared in the photographers' windows: 'Look at me, citizen; I am the ruler of the world!' And less conspicuously displayed were the softer-featured Austrian leaders with their many decorations; they seemed to be whispering—'I 'm in it too, though—don't forget that!'

He came to the Ballhausplatz, where the Foreign Ministry has its office; a couple of men with portfolios under their arms were walking straight toward the entrance gateway. From their inscrutable faces it was plain that they were co-operating in the giant work which enabled Austria to carry on a war on three separate fronts. The portfolios contained, perhaps, the materials for bringing about the establishment of a fourth[1]—the unintelligent faces of the pair were sufficient evidence that they were capable of that. Zillner looked scornfully at these tennis players, these *causeurs* of Vienna society. A pack of drones, he thought; impotent drones. The thing that had grown up out of all their documents had sent the useful workers in thousands to their death. In a colony of bees, the bodies of such futile meddlers would long since have been thrown out to rot under the hive. But in our world, they were suffered to go on, these cavaliers by the grace of ancestry and the tailor. At the end, when the results of the slaughter were reckoned up, they would be able to draw their fill of renown. But the others, the poor and simple, who had been shattered and torn to pieces, exploited by the great; the beasts of burden, whose desperate efforts had once more succeeded in pulling the cart out from the ditch, what would be their reward? Words—words and hollow phrases. New 'truths' would be coined, which true men's hearts would instinctively reject; yet the people would murmur them all the same, in an involuntary repetition, as with a rosary, and the priests would give their blessing; and then, on again, like drivers of carts condemned to an endless monotony of dull service, as tools for greater men's desire for power—conceived, born, duped, used up, and forgotten!

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[1] Rumania.

The war, thought Zillner, as he hobbled along on his crutches through the sunlight, giving himself up to his dreams—the war had revealed monstrous cankers and rottennesses in so-called incontrovertible truths. It was an Augean stable. But the business of war was merely to note down the symptoms, and, as those who believed in it imagined, to cut away the unsound parts. The work of carrying away the ruins left over, and building something new upon the site—that must be left to future generations. Zillner wondered what would come after it all. The lessons of the war were largely preached to empty benches; the many did not heed. Had not the history of the world cried aloud to them to let an aristocracy of intelligence replace that of blood? But had they listened? War after war they had fought with but little hope of success, thanks to the imbecility of those leaders. Yet still the solidarity among the high-born contrived to keep the babbling fools upon their feet. Would it be otherwise to-morrow? Was it not more probable that after a faint attempt to change, all would revert to the old *régime*? The lessons of history called for a general clearance, disinfection, and renewal—all that was done in reality was to patch up the old by so-called 'reforms.' A nation of priests and nobles, miserably lacking in ordinarily clever heads, and poorer still in prospects for the future. Cripples, thought Zillner, hobbling cripples . . . like himself!

He reached the entrance to the Volksgarten. At the Temple of Theseus a flock of children were shouting and playing. Behind the shady chestnuts, the crowded café beckoned invitingly. He was tired and dispirited, and made his way towards the entrance, seeking for a vacant table. As he stood looking round, some one called him by name, and a moment later Baroness Lisl Krottenburg stood before him, shaking his hand with unaffected pleasure. 'How lucky to meet you here—Moritz will be glad.'

He murmured a few words of greeting, with a foolish sense of shame at standing there on crutches face to face with a woman who had known him in the days when he was sound and whole. In her eyes, too, he could see that accursed expression of pity that he had noted in so many others. Swift as lightning she glanced at his disfigurement, as if it had not been there, and yet distinctly saying to herself—'A cripple—a cripple . . . poor fellow!'

Zillner bit his lips. 'I 've grown a bit lighter since last we met,' he said, and pointed with a forced smile to his leg.

They walked slowly through the crowd of curiously sympathetic spectators to her table. Krottenburg was there, his tall figure dressed now in mufti, and with a light overcoat thrown over his shoulders.

Krottenburg greeted him without surprise, and moved slightly to let him sit down. 'Yes, we 're out of it,' he said, in his drawling voice. 'We 're out of it now—just as things are beginning to move on a bit. Grand work they 've been doing lately. It 's hard to be idling here now. Well, perhaps by the autumn . . .' He coughed slightly.

Baroness Lisl's soft brown eyes turned anxiously towards him, with an expression as of a frightened bird guarding its nest. 'You mustn't talk so much, Moritz, you know.' And with a desperately appealing glance at Zillner, she asked: 'Don't you think he's looking well? He really has improved wonderfully, you know.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Zillner, with a glance at her husband, whose haggard face was flushed with a burning spot on either cheek. 'Wonderfully well!' And he looked away, striving not to appear startled at the terrible change.

The two men exchanged notes of their experiences. Zillner spoke of his brave little men, and how he had grown fond of them; how the blind slaughter had robbed him, first of all enthusiasm, then of his faith as a soldier, until at last all his ideals had collapsed, leaving nothing of the world for which he had lived till then. He spoke of the courage and willing sacrifice among the common men, and the greed of the leaders to exploit them; and, as is often the case with men whose ideas are crowded into a restricted circle of powerful and insistent thoughts, he drew upon his own experiences, and spoke by examples.

Krottenburg looked on uncomprehendingly, astonished at the hot flow of the other's words. His long and stainless ancestry held a protecting hand over him, and the words that had been the motto of his race for centuries stood plainly graven on his forehead now: '*Ich dien.*' His business it was to serve, not to ask where or why or how. A Krottenburg was not accustomed to question the cause for which he bled. He lived, and died if need be, under the device '*Ich dien.*'

But little Baroness Lisl listened greedily to Zillner's words. The all-embracing homelike unity of humanity which he looked forward to, and for which he pleaded so passionately, was something her heart could understand, now that her lover had come home to her a broken man. The last remains of those qualities which had distinguished the Krottenburg women by tradition had faded away—no more humility, patience, and thoughtless acceptance of all things as the best. And when Zillner had ended his condemnation of the existing state of things, she turned to him with flushed cheeks. 'You speak like a disciple of the Saviour,' she said earnestly. 'All that misery—it is dreadful! We had to leave Mähren, you know, long before we should. Italy—the cowardly traitors—they are going to make it all last longer still.' She strove to keep back her tears.

Zillner shrugged his shoulders. 'But, my dear Baroness, surely . . . we call them traitors—but for them, it is quite another matter. They look on it as a sacred struggle in the cause of freedom. To us it seems base, to them glorious.'

Lisl raised her eyebrows. 'But the treaty—they have broken their word—isn't that base ?'

'Treaty! They thought it was a good opportunity to take advantage of the situation—and up to now they have gained nothing by it. What is a treaty ? A scrap of paper! And as for traitors—treachery—we use the word when an unscrupulous neighbour puts us in a difficult position; while the unscrupulous neighbours themselves of course regard it as a proper observance of legitimate interests at a convenient time.'

Baroness Lisl wrung her hands. 'But surely it is revolting to any common sense of decency, the way they have acted here ?'

'Common decency counts for nothing in the labyrinth of majestic lies through which men are driven at such a time as this,' said Zillner harshly. 'It is just an individual conception, and the thing called truth is a poor cripple, that cannot move save on the crutches lent to it by power. It is helpless by itself.'

'Then you really think that might is the only right ? You do not believe that right alone can win in the end ? Just right alone, without any outward dress ?'

Zillner laughed—a short, bitter laugh. 'There is no such thing in our respectable world as right with no outward dress. It has to wear a cloak of some sort.

What is good and what is evil? It depends on the point of view. In the childhood of the world perhaps there may have been something absolute and unadulterated. But now, we have grown older, we have progressed by crooked stages, and loaded ourselves with all sorts of culture and refinement and luxury, the state of simplicity is ever so far away.' He was silent for a moment, and sat staring up at the dark trees. Then, speaking in a lower voice, his words dragging hopelessly, he went on: 'All of them call it a just war. All those who are now busy crushing in each other's heads with lumps of lead and splinters of iron. And all of them will declare when it is over that they were not to blame. Red books and blue books and yellow books—all shrieking out that it was the other's fault!

'Right!—think, Baroness, if Right could hover freely over this swamp of blood. All those who flounder about in it are constantly invoking it and uttering the most sacred vows. They call to it from all sides with flattering voices: "You are ours: We have a thousand proofs that you must be on our side—on ours alone." All shouting and threatening and whining the same story, from every camp in the universal swamp of blood. They have plundered every code of laws from Justinian to Machiavelli, and they call up the poets to sound their golden harps, and sing: "We are the judges of the earth. Come over to us." While they on the other side do exactly the same. And Right hovers indecisively hither and thither—always the same arguments, the same tune, the same cabalistic formula—which way is it to turn? Then a powerful hand grasps it ruthlessly by the wings. This way! The Italian Tyrtæus, Gabriele d'Annunzio; how cleverly he can blend false chords to a sensual hymn of war—like the unhealthy scribbler that he is. Millions believe in him. Are they all only fools or rogues? No; but their point of view is such that they can feel an honest enthusiasm for their own cause, while we are obliged by ours to be righteously indignant at their meanness. And when all is said, maybe this divine Gabriele himself is for once inspired by a pure flame—for what we here call treachery is for him the sacred cause of his people. And it is exactly the same with the Russians, English, French, Serbians, Japanese. And we—we make our bow, and hold out arguments just as convincing in the opposite direction, inviting Right to be on our side.'

'But where is it? It must be somewhere?' The Baroness looked at Zillner with the air of a child searching in vain for a favourite toy.

'It is simply wherever Might happens to be. Later on, Clio puts on objective spectacles, composes her wrinkled face to an expression of impartiality, and declares what force and decisiveness and luck have won to be the historical truth, without troubling as a rule about lengthy investigations as to whether the victor really had right on his side.'

Baroness Lisl shuddered. 'When you talk like that it is enough to make one lose all faith—in everything. . . .'

'Our faith, too, is crumbling,' said Zillner. 'But it does not fall. The men in the swamp of blood grasp their battered heads, and see confusedly that a strip of land east or west has changed hands . . . and the end of all the slaughter is a *Te Deum*, sung with intense conviction by those who happened to escape, or were wise enough to keep out of it all.'

'And they call it a time of great happenings,' she murmured, and her lips trembled. 'The children read about it in their schoolbooks and are taught to believe in the greatness of it all. And we . . .' She looked with tearful eyes at her husband.

Krottenburg had been sitting quietly, watching the people about. He turned to his wife as she spoke: 'Don't go philosophising about things, Lisl. We can't alter it, so it's no use.' He coughed slightly, and glanced away towards the stream of people coming and going. There was a waxen pallor about his ears, and thin furrows ran down behind them to the neck.

His wife sprang up, and, drawing a silk scarf from her jacket, laid it carefully round his throat. 'You shouldn't talk so much, Moritz, you know. And it 's getting cool. Hadn't we better be going ?'

Krottenburg rose to his feet with a certain effort. He offered his hand to Zillner, with a strange, cold glance, and bade him farewell in a formal tone.

Baroness Lisl smiled in some embarrassment. 'You must come and see us often, won't you ? Come as soon as you can. Only ring up first, and hear if we are at home.'

Her voice had the same kindly heartiness as of old.

Zillner awoke as from a dream. and looked at the pair. They stood there, ready to go. He rose to his feet, and stammered out : 'I beg your pardon—it was—I ought not perhaps . . .' And suddenly it struck him that he must appear ridiculous. He lifted Lisl's gloved hand to his lips and touched Krottenburg's extended fingers. Then they went off, and he sat there alone watching the retreating figures as they passed down between the rows of tables ; the man thin and stooping, and his wife walking close by his side as if to say : 'I will never leave you—never again. I will watch over and help you always, always.'

Zillner sat down again. Twilight was falling, with a delicate play of colours, red and yellow and silver ; the summer evening wearing its loveliest robes to greet its end. The café was almost deserted ; an old waiter came shambling up towards him holding out an evening paper. 'There 's news this time, sir. Russians have blown up Brest Litovsk, and we 're on the way to Moscow after them. That 's the way !' Zillner was looking away, watching the flow of gold down over the new, stone-grey Kaiserburg. As if to force his attention, the man went on : 'My only son 's at the front. He is in the artillery, at Dniestr. Well, it 'll soon be over now—what do you say, sir ?'

'Yes, yes, it ought to be,' said Zillner. 'But aren't you ever anxious about him ?'

'Well—I won't say—at times. Having only the one . . . but I say to myself the Lord couldn't take him away like that. Only the one, you know. . . .'

Zillner paid his reckoning, and the old man bowed and shambled away.

It was still current, then, that ancient formula of the miracle-workers! Millions of simple folk took it and lived on it in good faith. The Lord could not—it could not be His will to take my only son—or my two, three sons . . . my husband . . . my brother . . . each one of them found comfort in it, just as the old waiter had done. For a moment Zillner envied him his faith; envied him, and all the great world of church-goers, women and children, whose unquestioning minds dreamed wonderful fairy tales. Once upon a time there was a God. He created me and held His hand over me, and I pray to Him, and therefore He protects me. It cannot be His will that evil should happen to me. . . . Yes, he envied the masses. They went through life begging and praying for the miracles of God's grace, praying through all horrors, and growing only the more fervent when their prayers were of no avail. Even as they sank under the weight of the last affliction, they would see His loving face: 'Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

. . . .

The shadows sank deeper over the trees and spread out far over the gravel paths. The lamps were being lit. Zillner sat puffing cigarette smoke out into the evening air, and felt himself growing calmer. Out in the garden there, the figure of a girl hovered before his vision. Save yourself, brain-sick one! Cease to torture yourself with the thought of the massacres where beasts of burden are driven to the slaughter. Go your way, and let the masses go theirs. They will not thank you for all your pains—their Saviour is not yours. The normal state of the masses is a passive receptivity. And the poorer the truths which they can grasp, the simpler must they be. God is with us—therefore we must conquer. Conquer! That pleases them.

The thought wipes away all the dullness, misery, and torment of their life. We conquer! The word is in all their hearts. They shout together, and at last all are convinced that it must be so. What can you do, fool, against the suggestive force of words and phrases upon the mass, which leads them, as 'victors,' to forget all the wretchedness that has gone before? Go your own way in peace, and let them go theirs. Cease to torture yourself in vain. . . .

After the fifth cigarette, Zillner had regained his peace of mind, and his thoughts leaped lightly and softly towards the girl who was like a mountain flower. Erika . . . she was the goal of his longing . . . a home for his soul. He would love her and build palace after palace for her . . . no, cottages, with gardens of flowers. And no more loneliness! No more living alone with an unsatisfied desire, a vague will, an affection for those who after all would never understand . . . because the fabled God lived in them still, and was stronger than all else, stronger than the antics of a foolish philanthropist. The cruelties and kindness of the ancient miracle-worker held them now as they had done a thousand years ago. One man who saw through the cheat—how could he help them all?

. . . .

Darkness streamed through the great empty garden, slipping aside where the white light from the lamps of the Ringstrasse fell in narrow ribbons through the trees, yet strong enough to fill the treetops with grey, and blur the outline of tables and chairs and gravel paths.

Zillner took his crutches and made his way home. He smiled as he went—a smile of longing.

. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

'Now, ladies and gentlemen, as you are, if you please,' cried the photographer.

It was a touching group that had assembled at the entrance to the hospital garden. In front, seated on pillows in the grass, were three crippled infantrymen stretching the stumps of their legs towards the camera. In the centre, a couple of officers with bandaged heads were seated in armchairs. And behind them, standing, heroes with the glow of victory in their eyes, and coquettish wrappings about the forehead, the whole framed in a half circle of nurses endeavouring to look as sympathetic as possible.

'Oh, but Captain Zillner—he ought to—don't you think?' cried a girl's voice, and several others joined in. 'Yes, of course, we must have him too. Go and fetch him, some one.' The Sister who had attended Zillner from the first ran down into the garden. The photographer took his hand from the cap of the lens, blinked his eyes, and surveyed the grouping once more with a critical glance. Then he lit a cigarette and waited.

Zillner was sitting on a bench, writing.

'Oh, would you mind?' began the Sister shyly. 'We are being photographed, you know, and the others would like you to . . .'

He glanced up at her absently. 'I am not on exhibition as a crippled hero, thanks. You must excuse me.'

'But it 's for a charity, you know.'

'Of course—of course. And the poor men are handed about to be stared at by any one and every one. Sticking out their stumps of legs to show they are heroes. And people will stare at them, and turn up their eyes in admiration and pity—to-day. In a year's time nobody will care—an old story. It 's very sad, no doubt, they 'll say, but what can one do ? It was all that nasty war. And so on. And the heroes will go about grinding barrel organs or loafing superfluously through life with nobody to care, and nobody will think them worth photographing any longer.'

'But really they do,' said the Sister hesitatingly. 'Everybody buys them . . . and it can't hurt you surely, for once. . . . And there are some perhaps who would like to have a picture for remembrance—won't you, when I ask you ? '

'You 've plenty of gallant heroes with bandaged foreheads, what do you want with me ? And there are a couple of infantrymen who 'll be only too glad to represent the cripples' guild—isn't that enough ? To tell the truth, I don't care to be photographed for the sake of a disfigurement. I 've really nothing else to offer.'

The Sister blushed. 'It isn't that, truly,' she said. 'Wouldn't you—just for remembrance ? . . . I should be so glad ! ' She stood with bowed head, like a creature coming to the sacrifice. 'Kill me, but drink my blood,' she seemed to say. But Zillner could not or would not understand.

'How can you be so childish ? ' he said cruelly. 'What use would it be to you ? '

'Nothing, nothing,' she murmured. 'Only . . .' And she walked away.

Zillner called after her, 'Sister, don't be offended, I didn't mean . . .'

But she hurried away, with soft, humble steps that seemed begging pardon of the gravel they trod. Zillner saw her go up to join the group, and say a few words with a shrug of the shoulders, to all appearance calm enough. He could not see her sobbing as she disappeared afterwards inside the building, or tearing her handkerchief with her teeth on her way to the operating-room. When she entered, she was paler than usual, with the impenetrable gentleness of resignation in her homely face. Zillner saw nothing of that.

The photographer called out again: 'A moment, please, ladies and gentlemen. You, sir—the sound leg a trifle forward, if you wouldn't mind—thanks. Now quite still all, if you please—just a moment.'

The carefully ordered group stiffened breathlessly. The nurses posed their heads like the angels on cheap Christmas cards, and gazed into nothing with dreamy eyes. The coquettish heroes glared courageously into the camera's mouth.

'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. . . . And then just one more—only take a moment. . . .'

Zillner had finished his letter. He read it through. 'Dear Fräulein Erika,—Chance does not seem interested in our meeting again; permit me therefore to lend it a helping hand. I am here in Vienna once more; have been here two months now. As a cripple. With only one leg. I should like to see you again. Would you mind? I have not forgotten last spring.'

He was not altogether pleased with it—it said too much. And he had no right. . . . But his heart waived all objections aside. He must see her—somehow or other. Nothing else mattered. He hobbled off to the letter-box, and dropped the letter in.

. . . .

Three days later there came a card, in a neat sloping hand: 'Dear Captain Zillner,—I should very much like to see you again; it is long since I have heard from you. Will you be at the corner of Parkstrasse, left of the station entrance, on Thursday evening at six? I have the evening off then, and we could have a talk. Kind regards, yours. . . .'—'H'm. She might have written "affectionately." Thursday—that was day after to-morrow. "I should very much like to see you again." There was a chance after all—a chance of coming back to life.

Zillner hobbled round the garden in a confused state of mind, divided between joy and anxiety and a childish impatience. He was longing to know the truth. He read the card again. And as if heaven had purposely kept a pleasant surprise in store for him till that very day, there came on Thursday morning a little parcel and a large brown official envelope, with the diploma of the military cross 'for courageous devotion to duty under fire.' The parcel contained the red-and-white enamelled decoration, with the watered ribbon. Zillner flushed red with joy. It was a good omen. That very afternoon! . . . He fastened the glittering trinket to his tunic, and smiled. A cross—in return for a leg. It was a bad bargain. But if he could win her. . . . The idea was ridiculous, impertinent. A cripple—even a cripple with the military cross—what right had such a one to think . . . He looked at himself in the glass, a slender figure, and a pale, clean-shaven face. Not as ill-looking as many others perhaps. And delight came upon him in a rush of frothing waves, each wave-top bearing the lovely elfin figure of Hope.

By four o'clock he could wait no longer, but started out; it was a relief of a sort to know himself on the way. It was an hour's walk, but he took the car. Two ladies rose to offer him their seat; he thanked them in some embarrassment, and declined, and after a moment's hesitation they sat down again. And once more he marked that accursed look of pity in their eyes. He stood outside on the platform, and lit a cigarette. By the time he had reached his destination, it was just half-past four. He sat down at one of the tables in the café opposite the park, and looked absently through the papers, glancing continually over to the entrance, and smoking cigarettes.

At half-past five she came. But she was not alone. As she passed out under the arch a lieutenant of artillery appeared behind her—a tall, well-built man with a bandaged head. Zillner felt as if his heart had suddenly stopped—then it went on again with a rapid, hammering beat. Somebody with her. . . . Now they were talking together. Smiling to each other. The artilleryman talked rapidly and easily, and her beautiful calm eyes were fixed on his face. She was pleased to see him—that was evident enough. Then suddenly she turned, and looked up and down the street—Zillner drew back into a corner of the window. She looked at her wristlet watch, and said a few words to her companion; he saluted, struck his heels together, and smiled, but went on talking—insistently, it seemed. Then she bowed her head, and he took her hand. Zillner counted the seconds while they stood thus: one—two—three—four—five—six——six seconds! And then she bowed her head again and turned to go. But once more their hands met—this time only a brief touch—and she walked off, her companion saluting and watching her as she went. She walked slowly down towards the station, and he disappeared back through the park gate.

The whole scene had reeled itself off before Zillner's eyes as he sat in the curtained window of the café; it was like a fragment of a picture play, hurried, nervous, and blurred with movement. Should he go after all? What was the use? But hope patted him on the shoulder. The man might have been a relation, a mere acquaintance, it might mean nothing; it was ridiculous to suspect every trifling circumstance of warring against his happiness. And she would be waiting for him. He paid his reckoning, and hobbled off. She was standing with her back towards him as he came up.

'Good evening, Fräulein Erika.'

She turned, with a start, and blushed. Then held out her hand, and looked straight into his eyes. 'I'm so glad!' she said.

'It was awfully good of you to come,' said Zillner, and stood stiffly and helplessly holding his crutches.

She began again, hesitatingly. 'I—I was so glad to hear from you again.' They stood a moment in silence.

'Things have changed a good deal since the spring,' he ventured. 'Many things.'

'I . . . it was. . . . I 'm so glad you 're well again,' she stammered. Her eyes noted the cross on his tunic. 'And they 've given you the cross . . . congratulations!'

'Thanks,' said Zillner. 'Yes, that was as compensation for the loss of a leg.' He strove to speak carelessly, but both found it difficult to go on, and there was another pause.

She looked at the numbers of the cars as they came jangling up, stopped, and passed on. 'I must be going back again directly,' she murmured.

Zillner pulled himself together and spoke frankly and calmly. 'Fräulein Erika, I have not forgotten you—I have thought of you every day. Do you care for me as you did then?'

She looked down and fumbled with her glove. 'Yes indeed, really, I do. Very much. I like to think . . .'

Then suddenly he burst out: 'But your friend. . . . I was there before, you know when . . . you came out from the park. Is he . . . Is he the one you care for now? Tell me!'

She looked up with bright eyes, and her face flushed. 'We—we are engaged! It 's nearly a month now. I would have told you at once, only . . .' She stammered and broke off.

Zillner felt a rushing in his ears; his fingers gripped the handles of his crutches. 'Then—then I beg your pardon,' he stammered. He could feel that his cheeks had paled. But she did not seem to notice his agitation. 'There it is!' she cried—'My car—I must go. Good-bye, Captain, I 'm so glad you 're better.' She looked at him with a delicate shyness in her eyes.

He could not meet her glance, but stared past her into the empty air. 'Good-bye,' he said, and pressed her hand.

She hurried to the car, and waved her hand as it moved off, '*Auf Wiedersehen!*'

He bowed his head stiffly, and gave a little hopeless laugh. What was there left to him now? Was this all?—was there no more? He looked about him. Where was he to go? Where?

He got into the car that passed, asked for a transfer, and passed the station where he should have changed without heeding. He made the circle of the Ringbahn twice, and as the car drew up for the second time outside the Volksgarten, the conductor touched him on the shoulder. He stepped out, and went over to the open space where the children played, and sat down on a seat. The little ones were calling and laughing to each other. He noted it all absently at first; then he found himself watching a group by the sand-heap. They were playing at soldiers—Russians and Austrians. The Russians were the defenders, and lay huddled up behind the mound, a little girl was throwing handfuls of sand at the attacking party, while the rest lay in cover, firing with their wooden rifles. The Austrians charged, and drove the Russians out of the position. 'That was your fault, you little fool,' cried a thick-set boy with a paper crown. 'Can't even throw bombs properly. You 're no good at all.' The girl began to cry. 'I threw as hard as I could. It wasn't my fault—look here!' She held out her apron, full of sand. 'Well, we 'll let you try once more, and if you don't throw properly, you 'll be packed off to the rear, and Maxi Zehettner can be bomber instead.' The child dried her tears, and slunk off obediently behind the mound. The general posted his men once more; the victorious Austrians drew back behind some bushes, and after a brief council of war returned to make a fresh attack, dashing forward with loud cheers. The lady bomber did her best, but a detachment was sent off to take her in flank, and once more the sand-heap was captured. This was too much for the Russian leader; he rushed up to the girl and struck at her. 'There! You little fool! Haven't I told you to keep an eye on the flanks as well? Off you go to the rear! March!' The girl set up a howl.

Zillner rose from his seat and went towards them.

'Can't you play anything but soldiers?' he asked. 'It 's not a nice game really, you know.'

'Playing soldiers is the best fun of all,' answered the leader, saluting. 'If only she wasn't such a muddle-head with the bombs.' The girl had withdrawn to a corner of the position, and sat there discomfited, with her finger in her mouth.

'Anyhow, aren't you ashamed of yourself, to hit a little girl like that?'

'But it was all her fault. She 's no good at anything. We made her a machine-gun before, and it was just the same.'

'But war 's a nasty business, lad. You get killed, very likely, or have your legs shot off.'

'Then you 're a hero,' cried the paper-crowned enthusiast. 'I 'm going to be a soldier when I grow up, and go to the war. But we won't have her—she 'd only spoil it all.'

'Oh, please,' came a piteous murmur from the rejected one. 'Don't leave me behind. I promise to do it right if you will.'

Zillner hobbled away. War! It was like a violent fever. Even the children were not safe from its grasp. The grown-ups had been shouting and cheering for more than a year; the skies were hung with laurel—what wonder, then, that the fever spread? And those who sat at home alone with their sorrow and tears, in want and misery and wretchedness—all that they suffered was carefully hidden away under phrase and formula. It was God's will! For the sake of their country. Heroes and undying fame . . . giving their all. . . . But for what? Peasants who had never seen one another before were called upon to shoot and slay their fellows; labourers who had never so much as struck a brother-workman in a quarrel were sent out to take the life of men as guiltless as themselves. Factories worked day and night turning out wonderful contrivances to fling steel missiles and deathly gas abroad . , , for the sake of their country!—the country that called to each for the same sacrifice. And when the horror was past, and the patient beasts were driven homeward once more, they were paid with the same old phrases—their country's thanks! Heroes who had borne a part in the struggle for the right; in the cause of culture and civilisation. And then—they could go back to their work, and make preparations for the next occasion, when they would again be called upon to let themselves be slaughtered for the same idea. Thus each country called to its own; such were the cheap and senselessly false persuasions with which victor and vanquished hypnotised their masses. The victims themselves hardly knew what it all meant; dazed by the incense of words, they saw all things as in a mist, behind which reigned some mystic, uncomprehended fetish. 'We must be masters of the world,' for instance, or 'Prussian militarism must be annihilated—the freedom of the world maintained.' Or again: 'Your brothers—here or there—are oppressed; it is your duty to sacrifice yourselves in their cause.' And the poor beasts chew upon it for a while, and come to the conclusion that it must be right, though they don't quite understand. . . . Even the children. . . . Yes, it was there one should begin. First the children should be taught to understand the monstrous, criminal insanity of the thing called War.

So Zillner thought as he made his way along, scarcely knowing whither. He was thrown off his balance entirely, and could hardly realise what had happened to him. Back to the hospital he could not go—not yet. He turned down a quiet street in the old quarter of the town—there was a wineshop there where he had often seen wonderful visions in the polished glasses filled with gold. He would go there again.

The place was almost deserted, save for a couple of regular customers at their own particular table in one corner—sturdy citizens, manfully deciding the overthrow of Russia under the influence of their wine. They nodded in salute as he entered. He ordered a bottle of Muscatel, that grand strong wine that can make one forget all troubles. He drank off the first glass at a draught; there lay as it were a reflection of the afternoon in the bottom. He smoked cigarettes, and in the blue clouds he seemed to see figures acting the scene that had passed. After all—was it worth troubling about? Another glass of the golden comfort—surely there was nothing to be so miserable for.

A pretty girl—who happens to be engaged. Most pretty girls get engaged sooner or later. And as for what had passed in the spring—what was it after all? Something he had imagined, a dream without words. How could a man build up hopes upon such a foundation? He had been a fool, had gone on telling himself all sorts of fanciful things about her—and meanwhile, she had found some one else. Some one who was not a cripple.

He emptied the third glass.

Enfin—a girl! Sort of ballast for life, if you marry her. He himself was one of the lonely ones, who would not be able to share their kingdom with another. No, he was alone, and must remain so. After all, he was free—free! And Zillner fell to contemplating the future with a great complacency.

There was the hospital—yes. To-morrow he would take a flat somewhere outside the town, where he could look out over the green freshness of the Wienerwald. And there he could—what? Look at the others who were sound and whole, while he himself was left to hobble about day after day monotonously, telling respectable citizens the tale of how he lost his leg, until they all knew the story by heart. And at last he would be a withered and irritable invalid, a decrepit super in a play that no one cared to remember. And always alone . . . alone. . . . Once more the feeling of dread seized him, the inexplicable terror of something threatening, which had come upon him that day when Krottenburg had taken leave of him with such marked coolness. He glanced over at the two men in the corner. They were no doubt happy enough—able to make themselves comfortable after their own fashion, and take life easily. While he—a dreamer, without a place in the world. A super—one of those whose part it was to fall and be dragged off the stage. . . . Get up again? What for? What good would it do him?—or any one else?

The fourth glass set him dreaming again. Out by the vineyards ran a broad river. One might go down to the water and glide in, and be borne away, to sink down beneath kindly waves. To rest . . . with a weight of water over to keep one safely down. He would not be the first. And better that than to stand by helplessly here while others danced. It was no part for him to play. And the simple folk, the common men whom he had cared for, they would not thank him for standing by with a bitter smile while they were hopping and capering at their little festivals. No, better to step aside, out of it all. There was a river—it would carry him away . . . that was the best. And firmly, confidently, without regret, he emptied the fifth glass.

But the mischievous demon on guard that day was pleased at that moment to open the door, and usher in a picture of life with a triumphant smile on the lips.

Hans Heinz Sarapatka chanced to be passing that way, and his imposing figure appeared in the low doorway to the little room, where a stern resolution had just been taken, by one guest sitting alone, while the respectable citizens in the corner were hiccuping furiously and thundering with patriotic fists: 'Down with the Muscovite dogs!—make an end of them, and let the cultured peoples . . .'

Yes, Hans Heinz had appeared at the proper moment. His elegant figure was dressed in a new and splendid service uniform; he stood for a moment, first of all, in a picture *à la* Frederick the Great: '*Bonjour, monsieur.*' Then he caught sight of Zillner, and, with an expression of hearty sympathy on his Roman features, advanced towards him. 'A fortunate meeting

—my dear fellow. I am delighted! And the cross too! Sincere congratulations, indeed! May I sit down?'

Zillner was in high spirits all at once. 'How are you, my dear fellow?' he said cordially. 'Well rid of the contusion, I hope, and the neurasthenia, and all that? You 're looking so fit, one might think you were going to take the field again?'

Sarapatka glanced suspiciously at him; there was something in Zillner's tone that he could not quite make out. Was he drunk by any chance? 'Yes,' he said aloud. 'To the Italian front. Songs of victory, you know. Proper thing at the proper time. No more dull office work drafting proclamations.' He waved one arm majestically. 'Isn't it grand? The front steadfast as a steel wall on every side. In the north, a victorious advance such as the world has never seen; in the south, a defence simply classic. Stoical, impenetrable as the granite rocks upon which the brave defenders stand.'

'Lie, rather,' corrected Zillner with a humorous glance. 'And so you 're going to sing hallelujahs to it all? Sort of peacemaker for the professional scribblers now cheering as the wind blows? That 's right. The proper thing at the proper time. I remember a few months back when it was rather the proper thing to die —and you crept away to the rear and left others to do the dying. They 're dead now. Can't sing hymns of victory—so you do. Excellent. *Prosit!*'

Sarapatka found the other's jesting tone in rather bad taste; he did not know quite how to take it. But as a man of the world he preserved his self-control, and answered easily: 'I 'm afraid I don't quite follow you, my dear fellow. It would be ridiculous to protest against the general trend of the time; the common glorious awakening of a spirit of unity. The public must have its due. It is not to be satisfied with deeds alone, but craves the living word. It would be futile to try and swim against the stream.'

'*I* swim against the stream. And, you will see, the stream will turn and follow me.'

The poet was no longer in doubt—Zillner was drunk. The air of wisdom with which he spoke was enough. But it would not do to notice it. And he went on easily as before: 'It doesn't do to act on that as a rule. People who do are apt to be crucified, or burned at the stake.'

'Yes—and they submit willingly, for their words have power to open graves, and strew the earth with flowers, and shed a light over all the world.'

Hans Heinz knew that it is wiser not to contradict the drunk and the mad. So he nodded assent. 'A beautiful thought, and prettily expressed. But, believe me, you mistake the spirit of the masses altogether if you take it pessimistically. Now is the time to sow the seed of great and inspiring thoughts among them. If we had been defeated . . .'

'Then you would have written elegies or penitential hymns, I suppose?'

'And why not? One must take the tone and spirit of the day, and work from that. You are behind the times, with your dismal reflections—we who know better are far ahead and beyond—up in the clouds.' He threw back his head, and drew himself up with dignity. 'The mighty spirit of these days of victory is upon us all, even the least of us is caught up by it and must follow!'

'They will fall to earth again before long, helpless as flies in winter. And they will be sobered then, after their flight; they will see that the war is not merely a thrilling picture play as they at first imagined. "Here you are, ladies and gentlemen. The World War: monster film with the greatest number of actors ever known. Real powder and shot. The public itself taking part. For a short time only—come in and see it now." No, they will shake their heads and realise that they have lied to themselves; when the best of them have been slaughtered like beasts, after living like beasts in mud, filth, and vermin—though those who appoint the impresarios for popular entertainments of that kind never notice it. They have been trampled down there at the front, under a hail of lead, and in hospitals, and as prisoners in Siberia. Typhus, cholera, dysentery . . . who is to weigh their sighs, who is to count the tears they shed in their helplessness? Who will dare now to console us with the empty phrase: "The country needed sacrifice"? A roar of scornful laughter would ring through the world in echo, and a voice more terrible than any ever heard will give the answer, a voice rising up from the choir of the mourners, from all the misery of the world, filling the air with its vibrations. The country did not need it! What the country needed was work—the work of hand and brain. The development of its toiling millions into human beings, using the time they have to live to good purpose, and then passing out to nothingness, having their reward in the hearts of children that remember them. That is the country's need—and it is not to be won by years spent in shooting our fellow-men.'

'My dear Sir Prophet and Soothsayer, you are in error,' put in Hans Heinz with gentle remonstrance, as if talking to an invalid. 'Peace must be bought in the first place; from the earliest times it has been the nature of man to fight and plunder. Woe to the land that tries to live in peace without making itself secure by battle.'

'It is an artificial patriotism that preaches that text,' said Zillner quietly, looking steadily before him. 'And none of mine. There has never been a labourer or a peasant, an artist or a scientist, who wished for war. They are only too glad to live in peace, side by side, one sowing, another hammering, another teaching. And the few in whose heads a God sits dreaming—the very few in which a God sits and *thinks*—they love humanity too well to wish that it should have to purchase the freedom to work with bullets and powder. No! Among these millions, the only struggle is that which has always been, between the skilful and the unskilful worker; the ineradicable and healthy struggle for the right of ability to precedence.'

'All that 's just social paradoxes,' said Hans Heinz, shaking his head with a thoughtful expression. 'They may be some use in some distant future, but the problems of our present day must be solved with blood. There is no help for it—blood is the only thing that can prevent the earth on which we work from drying up into barren sand.'

'No, no,' insisted Zillner earnestly. 'There again you are talking artificial patriotism. The phrase is one of those coined by the few who have duped the many.'

'What few?' The poet looked with a certain half-unwilling interest at this extraordinary eccentric, whose pale face was now flushed with sudden heat.

'Let me tell you. First of all, there are those who look upon war as an exciting game for high stakes, people whose fortunate lot it is to look on from a distance, away from death and the peril of death. They hope that the war will puff their mediocrity up to immortal fame. With these rank the higher leaders and their assistants, those who drive on the masses; they too look forward to monuments commemorating their fame as conquerors of their country's enemies. And who are their enemies? Russian peasants—or Austrian, Serbian, Italian, English, Turkish—have they any conception of being enemies? Or the workers from the factories in the towns—do they long to crush in the skulls of fellow workers living thousands of miles away, men whom they have never seen? No—a thousand times no! It is the leaders behind who shout and roar out phrases about the country's need and eternal fame—and the peasants and workers who are driven on to slay their fellows.'

Hans Heinz took a cigarette from his gold case, lit it, and blew clouds of smoke towards the ceiling. 'You touch on problems which every thoughtful man must consider for himself at some time or another. But it is out of our power to solve them.'

'But you creative spirits are just the very ones who should whet these thoughts to a keener point, that they can penetrate into the minds of the masses. What are you here for, if not to serve humanity and the humane in higher spheres?'

The poet reached out one hand and flicked the ash from his cigarette. It was an elegant hand, with a gold bracelet on the wrist. 'We are here to live in harmony with the spirit of the time. From our higher sphere, we look down upon it and shape it,' he said with dignity.

'Excellent. As Goethe used to do. Or, to use a more modern illustration, like the profiteers of the industrial, commercial, and financial aristocracy, who are also interested in the maintenance of an artificial patriotism. They clap their hands enthusiastically at the slaughter, knowing well that the bloodshed will serve their ends. They support the war, swear by it, and only condemn its regrettable consequences when it happens that their competitor on the other side bags most of the profit. We want a new world, my friend.'

Hans Heinz shrugged his shoulders, and leaned back in his chair.

'It is all indeterminate at present,' went on Zillner. 'Once the egoism of the few has been crushed by a concentrated will to resist on the part of the many, then no one will listen to them any more—not even to those inexterminable vermin, the priests. The priests are partners in the whole thing—always ready to bolster up horrors and crimes as the will of God, and preaching at every opportunity that war is a divine institution. In case of need, they even talk of a holy war, and declare that the world will never be rid of it. *Dominus vobiscum!*'

'*Et cum spiritu tuo,*' added Hans Heinz. 'But it is only fair to admit that when the bells are chiming for peace, they are equally able to find divine authority for their *requiescant in pace.*'

'Cunning prompters to the stage of a lying theatre;

wily advocates for those who take care to keep out of the shadow of death! They bless the war! And the cultivators of artificial patriotism—they prepare it. Save for them, there would be no war. The fable of an inherent instinct in men to slay their fellows is an accursed lie!' Zillner had spoken the last words in a voice trembling with anger, and sat now biting his lips.

Sarapatka made no answer. Evidently, the man was ill, or at any rate nervous, and his attitude was, to say the least, foolish. He had no idea of taking advantage of a situation. After all, a poor cripple, what could he do anyway? Hans Heinz looked at his watch. The good citizens in the corner had thrust their chairs back and were preparing to leave; the waiter, who had been leaning drowsily against the stove, came forward and hovered about in readiness. The bibulous patriots settled their bill, and walked out with unsteady dignity, with a gesture of farewell to Zillner and his companion as they passed. '*Ja*, Beyerl,' one of them was saying. 'A great time. Just a year ago now, I was at Crado, for a holiday, bathing in the sea every day with ladies and gentlemen of both sexes, and now they 're fighting and killing each other all about. A great time—ay, a terrible time!'

Hans Heinz rose to take his leave. 'It 's getting late. I 'm going off to-morrow, so I shall hardly . . .'

'I understand. Sending out winged words. I hope the Italians will appreciate your style. Good-bye.'

'Now you 're sarcastic, I suppose,' said the poet in good-humoured condescension. 'You must try and pull yourself together, my dear fellow. Get out more into the air, and it will freshen you up. So long!' And he strode off with light, easy steps, consciously a victor in life's race.

Zillner sat on, staring into the haze of smoke that formed misty halos round the little electric lamps on the walls. The waiter was leaning against the stove, with a serviette over his arm, apparently dozing. And once more he felt the same horror of loneliness creeping upon him. Alone . . . alone. . . .'

Yes, men could pass him by, like that cunning boaster who had just gone. All of them. Pushing by, thrusting their way on, while he was left to sit in a corner and clench his fists at them, murmuring endlessly a refrain of how he had once been as strong and sound as they. Once—and now ? And what had brought him to it ? He was as innocent as they, yet he was cast aside, a cripple. They would smile in careless pity, and say nothing. Would pass on and leave him behind, to hobble as he might in search of life, a lonely man, with no place in the world. Ay, and in time an eccentric, a poor cripple, weak in the head. Grey-haired at last, and a jest for children : 'Hi, loony, tell us about the war—tell us a story, softy.' . . . Yes, that would be his part ; a witless man, called on to make sport for thoughtless urchins in the street. No—he would not live to be jeered at by children. Though, after all, the children . . . children were the one thing he cared most for now in all the world. But for that very reason he could not bear it. No ; there was a river. . . .

Zillner drove back to the hospital in a cab with wonderful soft springs. His trouble was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

The whole country was decked with broideries of red and green and gold; they hung from the trees, flowed out over the vineyards, and flamed in the avenues. Millions of leaves still breathed, but they were red as in the flush of fever, or stared out yellowly, and had begun to bid farewell to the world. Only the strongest and hardiest clung fast to their branches. The frost was still far off; they would not pale until it came. And then there were the pines; dark green and untroubled amid the resignation of the early fading trees that knew their yearly death was near. And above the soft rain of leaves from the summer-wearied, the hectic flush of the sick, and the calm of the evergreen, rose the golden blue of the sky. Fine white gossamer threads played in the air, fastened themselves to the vines on the heights of Kahlenberg, floated hesitatingly over the forests, or were caught up by the telegraph wires or the branches of creepers on the roofs of houses. The river, too, was sparkling in the autumn sunlight. It glided lazily out from between the hills, with silvery-white streaks of light dancing on its faintly rippled surface. Nature was keeping holiday—one of these festal days when all the delight of life seems poured out over the earth in brightness and warmth and a quiet, drowsy calm.

Zillner rejoiced at it all. God was kind, to let him feel thus how good it was to be alive! It would have been sad to take leave of life in rain and storm, but now—it was pleasant and good.

The road passed close beside the river; some beeches leaned out over the bank. And in the water itself, the willows crept out right to the white stones of the embankment. He looked out over the river. It came gliding out in a mighty curve from the west, went gurgling past, and disappeared in a dull silver-grey mist far to the east. A little black steamer was making its way down the channel under a trail of smoke, hauling a chain of heavy barges after it.

Fodder for the beasts to be slaughtered in Serbia, thought Zillner—meal to fill their bellies before the next attempt. Then over the river again, dashing on like a pack of wolves, into a *mêlée* of tearing and gnashing and flaying. Urged forward out of the dark and dullness and narrowness of view by the cry: 'Kill the others, for they are your enemies.' Thus they would dash screaming across the Danube, to tear at the throats of men. In the early Middle Ages, they had marched towards the east, under the bloody fetish of the Cross. The same sun had looked down on the armies of madmen assembled in the holy name of the Saviour. The wave of peoples surged back again, with the Crescent at its head; in the name of Him whom they did not understand came the same mad cry from the east. The Danube had seen it all. Had seen the fury of the Swede, and the rapacity of the great Corsican. All, all for the sake of some catchword! And now—now, thought Zillner, it is the madness of nationality that is raging over a bleeding world. Growing up over the culture of nations, shutting them out one from another, building walls and ramparts of misunderstanding and suspicion between them. It was the new religion of misguided humanity, and for its sake the angel of murder had harried the earth for over a year. That one idea which severed people from people, and tore Europe asunder, was it to be the last thought in the minds of the people of earth? Zillner stared out over the water. Would there come a day, beyond the laurels and the monuments and banners, and the ringing speeches, when a new Saviour should lead His little ones forth, from the dark cellars where they cowered, into a home fit for human souls? Would there come a day when pitiless scornful laughter would make an end of the lying phrases that called the murdering of men a necessary sacrifice? He found no answer. The stream glided by, and its sluggish waters seemed only to murmur: 'Vanity—all is vanity!'

He clambered up on to the embankment and smiled at himself—cripple and clairvoyant—seeing all things darkly. Something in him whispered of another way the world might take: a generation of robust and self-taught individuals, unaffected by the lying inconsistencies of so-called intellectuals; liberated from the paralysing faith in the validity of black and white assertions—free from the weakness of the leading classes with their fractional thoughts, their obsequious words, and their carefully composed enthusiasm; immune from the half-hearted ill-will of the lazy and weary ones in drawing-rooms and departments. Yes—a generation of whole-minded, earnest men, who should search for the truth, like bloodhounds, and perchance find it. But would they not then be too harsh, too intolerant and unsympathetic?—part proselytising zealots, part tyrants? The men of mature mind would turn from them if so; their words would ring in the empty air, or find echo only in the mouths of the foolish. It was idle, idle, idle to think of it all! All things were in a flowing mass, like the quiet river itself. The lightest stuff, however worthless, floated on the surface, all that was weighty sank beneath the waves. The human mind could not grasp the dream of a God fashioned in its own image! . . . And all the good things that sprang from the sun, all the sacred warmth in the eyes of children and dreamers, could not drive away their dark inheritance. The shadow of freedom creeps after men from the dark clefts of the past; in vain the best of them seek safety, making towards the sun; the rest are captured by the shadow once more. And they grope about in its darkness, endlessly, endlessly. . . . Peace! One day, sooner or later, a sunbeam would steal down to them in the dark. They would rise up from their maze of blood and smoke and cheering, and look on one another in astonishment. What had it been like, that time? Rub their eyes and wonder! Had there ever really been any such time at all? The priests would swing their censers: 'Great God, we praise Thee!' The bells chiming, men of letters writing hymns, and here and there monuments appearing. But already the longing to forget it all is growing up among the masses. Life—life, is the cry. The dead find words; the all too living coin them. . . . A madhouse, thought Zillner, the world was a madhouse. They would rejoice at a state which they had taken before for granted, now that it had returned. They would shout and fall on one another's necks for joy that they were no longer to tear at one another's throats. There would be waving of flags, and the common folk would follow the phrase of the day, until a new desire of plunder, a new catchword, herded them once more together for a new slaughtering. And call it holy!

What was there for him to do in this world of the blind, thought Zillner. How could he bear to live on, when his heart was rent by the lying chorus to which all danced—some stupidly heedless, some with a hypocritical mask of faith, and some grumbling like unwilling beasts.

To sink down happily into the nothing whence we came, and whither we must return—that was the best way for such men as he in such an age—an age the world called 'great.'

He threw away his crutches, and slid down the bank towards the water. The river sent up a murmur of kindly greeting. The sun smiled gently down upon him, and the willows seemed whispering: 'Home, home!'

He drew himself forward over the sharp stones toward the water, and braced his arms for the last thrust.

There was a sound of children's voices. It came from the beeches, a wave of prattle and laughter and delighted cries, the sweetly simple utterings of the only beings that are truly glad.

Zillner listened. The young voices danced on the air behind him, on the farther side of the green wall. Some seemed to be leaping joyfully up into the air, others tumbling about like puppies on the grass, or hovering like the song of larks high in the blue. They were singing.

Zillner stared into the wall of green, and trembled. Children! The one thing he loved best in all the world. He must see them—once more he must see. . . .

And he crept up the slope to where he had dropped his crutches. Shyly, trembling with the yearning of his heart, he hobbled towards the green curtain whence the voices came. But when he reached the road, under the shade of the trees, the sound had gone. Far away a laugh and a gay calling faded away into the silence of the beeches.

He stood bending forward to listen. Then suddenly there was the sound of little feet tripping through the wood, and a child crying. A moment later a little girl stood before him.

'Where have they gone?' she asked, looking up with a pitiful grimace. 'I've lost the others; please, can you tell me where they are?' The child's clothes were torn and plastered with dirt. She looked up tearfully, with guilty dread, at the big man.

'Where did you lose them, little one?'

'We—we were picking berries, and I fell down in a hole, and then they were gone.'

'Come with me, then,' said Zillner, taking the child's hand; 'we'll go along together and find them. Never fear.'

The child stopped whimpering. Then, looking up, she asked, 'But why have you only got one leg? We shall never catch up with them now? Can you run?'

'Run—I'll fly—you see! But you must fly on, and I'll call out and tell you the way.'

So, following a little girl with torn and draggled clothes, Zillner hobbled along in search of the children, the little saviours of the world.

And the golden trees seemed waving towards him in greeting.

THE END

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